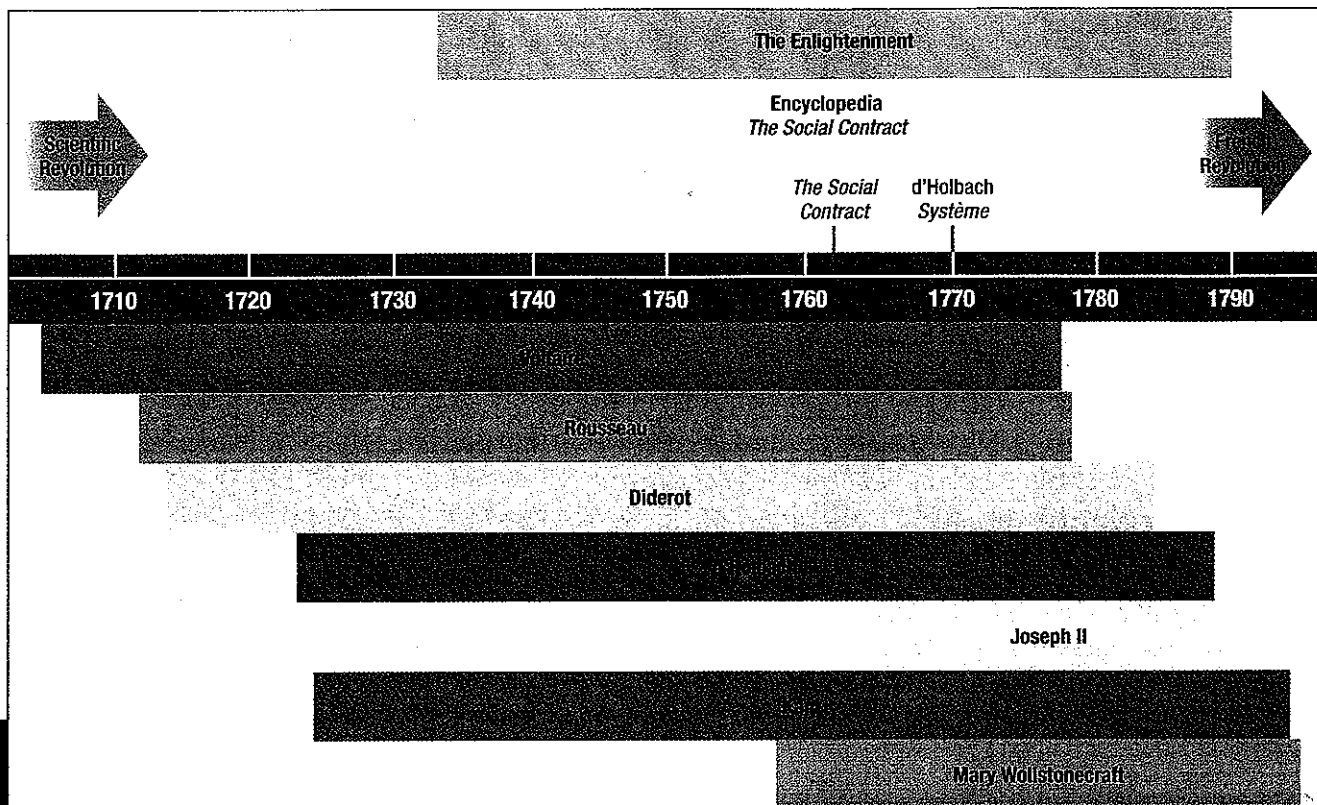




8 The Enlightenment

As a period of intellectual history in Western civilization, the eighteenth century is known quite appropriately as the Enlightenment. At that time a group of thinkers, called the *philosophes*, developed and popularized related sets of ideas that formed a basis for modern thought. Their methods emphasized scepticism, empirical reasoning, and satire. They spread their ideas through works ranging from pamphlets to the great *Encyclopædia* and numerous meetings in aristocratic "salons." Although centered in France, this intellectual movement took place throughout Europe.

Most of the *philosophes* believed that Western civilization was on the verge of enlightenment, that reasoning and education could quickly dispel the darkness of the past that had kept people in a state of immaturity. The main

objects of their criticism were institutions, such as governments and the Church, and irrational customs that perpetuated old ways of thinking and thus hindered progress. While critical and combative, the *philosophes* were not political or social revolutionaries. Their ideas were revolutionary in many ways, but in practice these thinkers hoped for rather painless change—often through reform from above by enlightened monarchs. Enlightenment thinkers usually admired England, where liberal ideas and practices were most developed.

The sources in this chapter concern three issues. First, what was the nature of Enlightenment thought? What was the professed spirit of the Enlightenment? What patterns of morality were embodied in Enlightenment ideas? In what ways was authority rejected and nature elevated to great

importance? Second, how should we characterize the *philosophes*? Who were they? What were their common psychological traits, their religious beliefs, and their interactions? Finally, how did Enlightenment thought affect eighteenth-century politics before the French Revolution? Was there such a phenomenon as “enlightened despotism,” and if so, what did it mean?



Primary Sources

What Is Enlightenment?

Immanuel Kant

One of the most pervasive themes among Enlightenment thinkers was a self-conscious sense of a spirit of enlightenment. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from a short essay by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) of Königsberg in East Prussia. Kant, one of the world’s most profound philosophers, is particularly known for his analysis of the human mind and how it relates to nature, as set forth in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). In the following essay, written in 1784, Kant defines the spirit of the Enlightenment and describes some of its implications.

CONSIDER: What Kant means by “freedom” and why he feels freedom is so central to the Enlightenment; how people can become enlightened and the appropriate environment to facilitate this enlightenment; what Kant would consider “mature”; how Kant relates enlightenment and politics.

Enlightenment is man’s leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one’s intelligence without the guidance of another. Such immaturity is self-caused if it is not caused by lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one’s intelligence without being guided by another. *Sapere Aude!* Have the courage to use your own intelligence! is therefore the motto of the enlightenment.

Through laziness and cowardice a large part of mankind, even after nature has freed them from alien guidance, gladly remain immature. It is because of laziness and cowardice that it is so easy for others to usurp the role of guardians. It is so comfortable to be a minor! If I have a book which provides meaning for me, a pastor who has conscience for me, a doctor who will judge my diet for me and so on, then I do not need to exert myself. I do not have any need to think; if I can pay, others will

Together, the sources should reveal an intellectual movement still tied to the traditional society of the Ancien Régime but with strikingly modern characteristics. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, many of the ideas of the Enlightenment played an important role in the French Revolution—the subject of the next chapter.

take over the tedious job for me. The guardians who have kindly undertaken the supervision will see to it that by far the largest part of mankind, including the entire “beautiful sex,” should consider the step into maturity, not only as difficult but as very dangerous. . . .

But it is more nearly possible for a public to enlighten itself: this is even inescapable if only the public is given its freedom. . . .

All that is required for this enlightenment is freedom; and particularly the least harmful of all that may be called freedom, namely, the freedom for man to make public use of his reason in all matters. . . .

The question may now be put: Do we live at present in an enlightened age? The answer is: No, but in an age of enlightenment. Much still prevents men from being placed in a position or even being placed into position to use their own minds securely and well in matters of religion. But we do have very definite indications that this field of endeavor is being opened up for men to work freely and reduce gradually the hindrances preventing a general enlightenment and an escape from self-caused immaturity. In this sense, this age is the age of enlightenment and the age of Frederick (The Great). . . .

I have emphasized the main point of enlightenment, that is of man’s release from his self-caused immaturity, primarily in matters of religion. I have done this because our rulers have no interest in playing the guardian of their subjects in matters of arts and sciences. Furthermore immaturity in matters of religion is not only most noxious but also most dishonorable. But the point of view of a head of state who favors freedom in the arts and sciences goes even farther; for he understands that there is no danger in legislation permitting his subjects to make public use of their own reason and to submit publicly their thoughts regarding a better framing of such laws together with a frank criticism of existing legislation. We have a shining example of this; no prince excels him whom we admire. Only he who is himself enlightened does not fear spectres when he at the same time has a well-disciplined army at his disposal as a guarantee of public peace. Only he can say what (the ruler of a) free state dare not say: *Argue as much as you want and about whatever you want but obey!*

SOURCE: Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” in *The Philosophy of Kant*, Carl J. Friedrich, ed. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc. (New York, 1949), pp. 132–134, 138–139. Copyright © 1949 by Random House, Inc.

The System of Nature

Baron d'Holbach

Most Enlightenment thinkers rejected traditional sources of authority such as the Church or custom. Instead, they argued that people should rely on reason, experience, and nature as their guides. Baron d'Holbach (1723–1789) exemplifies this in his varied writings. A German aristocrat and scientist who assumed French citizenship, d'Holbach is best known for his attacks on organized religion and his contributions to Diderot's *Encyclopedia*. In the following selection from his *System of Nature* (1770), d'Holbach focuses on the meaning of enlightenment and what should be done to obtain this enlightenment.

CONSIDER: Why enlightenment is so important; whether "nature" has a meaning similar to God for d'Holbach; the views about the nature of enlightenment that Kant and d'Holbach share.

The source of man's unhappiness is his ignorance of Nature. The pertinacity with which he clings to blind opinions imbibed in his infancy, which interweave themselves with his existence, the consequent prejudice that warps his mind, that prevents its expansion, that renders him the slave of fiction, appears to doom him to continual error. He resembles a child destitute of experience, full of idle notions: a dangerous leaven mixes itself with all his knowledge: it is of necessity obscure, it is vacillating and false:—He takes the tone of his ideas on the authority of others, who are themselves in error, or else have an interest in deceiving him. To remove this Cimmerian darkness, these barriers to the improvement of his condition; to disentangle him from the clouds of error that envelop him, that obscure the path he ought to tread; to guide him out of this Cretan labyrinth, requires the clue of Ariadne, with all the love she could bestow on Theseus. It exacts more than common exertion; it needs a most determined, a most undaunted courage—it is never effected but by a persevering resolution to act, to think for himself; to examine with rigour and impartiality the opinions he has adopted. . . .

The most important of our duties, then, is to seek means by which we may destroy delusions that can never do more than mislead us. The remedies for these evils must be sought for in Nature herself; it is only in the abundance of her resources, that we can rationally expect to find antidotes to the mischiefs brought upon us by an ill-directed, by an overpowering enthusiasm. It is time these remedies were sought; it is time to look the

evil boldly in the face, to examine its foundations, to scrutinize its super-structure: reason, with its faithful guide experience, must attack in their entrenchments those prejudices to which the human race has but too long been the victim. For this purpose reason must be restored to its proper rank,—it must be rescued from the evil company with which it is associated. . . .

Truth speaks not to these perverse beings:—her voice can only be heard by generous minds accustomed to reflection, whose sensibilities make them lament the numberless calamities showered on the earth by political and religious tyranny—whose enlightened minds contemplate with horror the immensity, the ponderosity of that series of misfortunes with which error has in all ages overwhelmed mankind.

The *civilized man*, is he whom experience and social life have enabled to draw from nature the means of his own happiness; because he has learned to oppose resistance to those impulses he receives from exterior beings, when experience has taught him they would be injurious to his welfare.

The *enlightened man*, is man in his maturity, in his perfection; who is capable of pursuing his own happiness; because he has learned to examine, to think for himself, and not to take that for truth upon the authority of others, which experience has taught him examination will frequently prove erroneous. . . .

It necessarily results, that man in his researches ought always to fall back on experience, and natural philosophy: These are what he should consult in his religion—in his morals—in his legislation—in his political government—in the arts—in the sciences—in his pleasures—in his misfortunes. Experience teaches that Nature acts by simple, uniform, and invariable laws. It is by his senses man is bound to this universal Nature; it is by his senses he must penetrate her secrets; it is from his senses he must draw experience of her laws. Whenever, therefore, he either fails to acquire experience or quits its path, he stumbles into an abyss, his imagination leads him astray.

Prospectus for the Encyclopedia of Arts and Sciences

Denis Diderot

More than any other work, the *Encyclopedia of Arts and Sciences*, edited by Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean-le-Rond d'Alembert (1717–1783), epitomizes the Enlightenment.

SOURCE: Baron d'Holbach, *The System of Nature*, trans. H. D. Robinson (Boston: J. P. Mendum, 1853), pp. viii–ix, 12–13, 15.

SOURCE: "The Encyclopedia Announced" from *Major Crises in Western Civilization, Volume II, 1745 to the Nuclear Age* by Richard W. Lyman and Lewis W. Spitz, copyright © 1965 by Harcourt Brace & Company and renewed 1993 by Richard W. Lyman and Lewis W. Spitz, reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Written between 1745 and 1780, it presented to the public the sum of knowledge considered important by Enlightenment thinkers. The critical Enlightenment spirit underlying the Encyclopedia led traditional authorities to condemn it and to suppress it more than once. The following is an excerpt from the Prospectus that appeared in 1750, announcing the forthcoming Encyclopedia. The Prospectus was written by Diderot, a philosopher, novelist, and playwright who had already been in trouble with the authorities for his writings. The Prospectus apparently aroused widespread expectations; even before the first volume of the Encyclopedia appeared, more than a thousand orders for it had been received.

CONSIDER: *What a reader could hope to gain by purchasing the Encyclopedia and how these hopes themselves reflect the spirit of the Enlightenment; how this selection from the Prospectus reflects the same ideas expressed by Kant and d'Holbach; how the Enlightenment as described here related to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century.*

It cannot be denied that, since the revival of letters among us, we owe partly to dictionaries the general enlightenment that has spread in society and the germ of science that is gradually preparing men's minds for more profound knowledge. How valuable would it not be, then, to have a book of this kind that one could consult on all subjects and that would serve as much to guide those who have the courage to work at the instruction of others as to enlighten those who only instruct themselves!

This is one advantage we thought of, but it is not the only one. In condensing to dictionary form all that concerns the arts and sciences, it remained necessary to make people aware of the assistance they lend each other; to make use of this assistance to render principles more certain and their consequences clearer; to indicate the distant and close relationships of the beings that make up nature, which have occupied men; to show, by showing the interlacing both of roots and of branches, the impossibility of understanding thoroughly some parts of the whole without exploring many others; to produce a general picture of the efforts of the human spirit in all areas and in all centuries; to present these matters with clarity; to give to each the proper scope, and to prove, if possible, our epigraph by our success: . . .

The majority of these works appeared during the last century and were not completely scorned. It was found that if they did not show much talent, they at least bore the marks of labor and of knowledge. But what would these encyclopedias mean to us? What progress have we not made since then in the arts and sciences? How many truths discovered today, which were not foreseen then? True philosophy was in its cradle; the geometry of infinity

did not yet exist; experimental physics was just appearing; there was no dialectic at all; the laws of sound criticism were entirely unknown. Descartes, Boyle, Huyghens, Newton, Leibnitz, the Bernoullis, Locke, Bayle, Pascal, Corneille, Racine, Bourdaloue, Bossuet, etc., either had not yet been born or had not yet written. The spirit of research and competition did not motivate the scholars: another spirit, less fecund perhaps, but rarer, that of precision and method, had not yet conquered the various divisions of literature; and the academies, whose efforts have advanced the arts and sciences to such an extent, were not yet established. . . . At the end of this project you will find the tree of human knowledge, indicating the connection of ideas, which has directed us in this vast operation.

The Philosophe

Enlightenment thinkers often referred to themselves as "philosophes," which is technically the French word for philosophers. The term had a special meaning bound up with the spirit of the Enlightenment. This is dealt with directly in the following selection, "The Philosopher," from the Encyclopedia. It has traditionally been assumed that Diderot is the author of "The Philosopher," but it may have been written by another person, perhaps Du Marsais. In any case, it is an authoritative treatment of the topic according to Enlightenment precepts.

CONSIDER: *The characteristics of the philosopher; how this compares to Kant's definition of enlightenment and d'Holbach's definition of a civilized or enlightened man; how a twentieth-century philosopher might differ with this definition of a philosopher.*

Other men make up their minds to act without thinking, nor are they conscious of the causes which move them, not even knowing that such exist. The philosopher, on the contrary, distinguishes the causes to what extent he may, often anticipates them, and knowingly surrenders himself to them. In this manner he avoids objects that may cause him sensations that are not conducive to his well being or his rational existence, and seeks those which may excite in him affections agreeable with the state in which he finds himself. Reason is in the estimation of the philosopher what grace is to the Christian. Grace determines the Christian's action; reason the philosopher's.

SOURCE: Merrick Whitcomb, ed., "French Philosophers of the Eighteenth Century," in *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, vol. VI, no. 1, ed. Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1898), pp. 21–23.

Other men are carried away by their passions, so that the acts which they produce do not proceed from reflection. These are the men who move in darkness; while the philosopher, even in his passions, moves only after reflection. He marches at night, but a torch goes on ahead.

The philosopher forms his principles upon an infinity of individual observations. The people adopt the principle without a thought of the observations which have produced it, believing that the maxim exists, so to speak, of itself; but the philosopher takes the maxim at its source, he examines its origin, he knows its real value, and only makes use of it, if it seems to him satisfactory.

Truth is not for the philosopher a mistress who vitiates his imagination, and whom he believes to find everywhere. He contents himself with being able to discover it wherever he may chance to find it. He does not confound it with its semblance; but takes for true that which is true, for false that which is false, for doubtful that which is doubtful, and for probable that which is only probable. He does more—and this is the great perfection of philosophy; that when he has no real grounds for passing judgment, he knows how to remain undetermined.

The world is full of persons of understanding, even of much understanding, who always pass judgment. They are guessing always, because it is guessing to pass judgment without knowing when one has proper grounds for judgment. They misjudge of the capacity of the human mind; they believe it is possible to know everything, and so they are ashamed not to be prepared to pass judgment, and they imagine that understanding consists in passing judgment. The philosopher believes that it consists in judging well: he is better pleased with himself when he has suspended the faculty of determining, than if he had determined before having acquired proper grounds for his decision.

The philosophic spirit is then a spirit of observation and of exactness, which refers everything to its true principles; but it is not the understanding alone which the philosopher cultivates; he carries further his attention and his labors.

Man is not a monster, made to live only at the bottom of the sea or in the depths of the forest; the very necessities of his life render intercourse with others necessary; and in whatsoever state we find him, his needs and his well-being lead him to live in society. To that reason demands of him that he should know, that he should study and that he should labor to acquire social qualities.

Our philosopher does not believe himself an exile in the world; he does not believe himself in the enemy's country; he wishes to enjoy, like a wise economist, the goods that nature offers him; he wishes to find his pleasure with others; and in order to find it, it is necessary to

assist in producing it; so he seeks to harmonize with those with whom chance or his choice has determined he shall live; and he finds at the same time that which suits him: he is an honest man who wishes to please and render himself useful.

The philosopher is then an honest man, actuated in everything by reason, one who joins to the spirit of reflection and of accuracy the manners and qualities of society.

Philosophical Dictionary: The English Model

Voltaire

François Marie Arouet, who later adopted the name Voltaire (1694–1778), was certainly the most famous of the philosophes. Writing almost every type of literature, from drama and satire to history and essays, he exhibited most of the main elements of the Enlightenment. One of these was the philosophes' admiration for and idealization of England's political system. Voltaire gained familiarity with England during a three-year visit, from 1726 to 1729, and played an important role in popularizing the ideas of English scientists and the principles of the English political system. The following is an excerpt from his Philosophical Dictionary, first published in 1764.

CONSIDER: *What Voltaire admires about the English constitution; the implied criticism of the French political system; whether Voltaire idealizes the English system.*

The English constitution has, in fact, arrived at that point of excellence, in consequence of which all men are restored to those natural rights, which, in nearly all monarchies, they are deprived of. These rights are, entire liberty of person and property; freedom of the press; the right of being tried in all criminal cases by a jury of independent men—the right of being tried only according to the strict letter of the law; and the right of every man to profess, unmolested, what religion he chooses, while he renounces offices, which the members of the Anglican or established church alone can hold. These are denominated privileges. And, in truth, invaluable privileges they are in comparison with the usages of most other nations of the world! To be secure on lying down that you shall rise in possession of the same property with which you retired to rest; that you shall not be torn from the arms of your wife, and from your children, in the dead of night,

SOURCE: Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, in Voltaire, *Works*, trans. W. F. Fleming (New York: E. R. Dumont, 1901), vol. 5, pp. 293–294.

to be thrown into a dungeon, or buried in exile in a desert; that, when rising from the bed of sleep, you will have the power of publishing all your thoughts; and that, if you are accused of having either acted, spoken, or written wrongly, you can be tried only according to law. These privileges attach to every one who sets his foot on English ground. A foreigner enjoys perfect liberty to dispose of his property and person; and, if accused of any offence, he can demand that half the jury shall be composed of foreigners.

I will venture to assert, that, were the human race solemnly assembled for the purpose of making laws, such are the laws they would make for their security.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Mary Wollstonecraft

While the Enlightenment was dominated by men, there were possibilities for active involvement by women. Several women played particularly important roles as patrons and intellectual contributors to the gatherings of philosophes and members of the upper-middle-class and aristocratic elite held in the salons of Paris and elsewhere. It was, however, far more difficult for a woman to publish serious essays in the Enlightenment tradition. Indeed, Enlightenment thinkers did little to change basic attitudes about the inferiority of women. One person who managed to do both was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), a British author who in 1792 published A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. The book was a sharply reasoned attack against the oppression of women and an argument for educational change. In the following excerpt Wollstonecraft addresses the author of a proposed new constitution for France that, in her opinion, does not adequately deal with the rights of women.

CONSIDER: *Why education is so central to her argument; the ways in which this argument reflects the methods and ideals of the Enlightenment.*

Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she knows why she ought to be virtuous? unless freedom strengthens her reason till she comprehends her duty, and sees in what manner it is connected with her real

good. If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman at present shuts her out from such investigations.

In this work I have produced many arguments, which to me were conclusive, to prove that the prevailing notion respecting a sexual character was subversive of morality, and I have contended, that to render the human body and mind more perfect, chastity must more universally prevail, and that chastity will never be respected in the male world till the person of a woman is not, as it were, idolised, when little virtue or sense embellish it with the grand traces of mental beauty, or the interesting simplicity of affection.

Consider, sir, dispassionately these observations, for a glimpse of this truth seemed to open before you when you observed, “that to see one-half of the human race excluded by the other from all participation of government was a political phenomenon, that, according to abstract principles, it was impossible to explain.” If so, on what does your constitution rest? If the abstract rights of man will bear discussion and explanation, those of woman, by a parity of reasoning, will not shrink from the same test; though a different opinion prevails in this country, built on the very arguments which you use to justify the oppression of woman—prescription.

Consider—I address you as a legislator—whether, when men contend for their freedom, and to be allowed to judge for themselves respecting their own happiness, it be not inconsistent and unjust to subjugate women, even though you firmly believe that you are acting in the manner best calculated to promote their happiness? Who made man the exclusive judge, if woman partake with him of the gift of reason?

The Age of Reason: Deism

Thomas Paine

Many Enlightenment thinkers were strongly opposed to traditional religious institutions and ideas. Yet only a few went so far as to profess atheism. More typical was some form of deism, a belief in a God who created a rational universe with natural laws but who no longer intervened in the course of events. A good example of this belief is found in the following excerpt from Thomas Paine’s Age of Reason (1794). Paine (1737–1809) was an unusually international person. Born in England, he became an American patriot and later a

member of the French Convention (1792–1793). His most famous works are *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*, in both of which he justifies revolution. In *The Age of Reason* Paine places himself within the tradition of Enlightenment thought and summarizes his religious views.

CONSIDER: *Why Paine is so opposed to traditional religious institutions; how this opposition is consistent with other Enlightenment thought; how a sincere, sophisticated member of the Catholic Church might have responded to this.*

As several of my colleagues, and others of my fellow-citizens of France, have given me the example of making their voluntary and individual profession of faith, I also will make mine; and I do this with all that sincerity and frankness with which the mind of man communicates with itself.

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

I believe the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy.

But, lest it should be supposed that I believe many other things in addition to these, I shall, in the progress of this work, declare the things I do not believe, and my reasons for not believing them.

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

I do not mean by this declaration to condemn those who believe otherwise; they have the same right to their belief as I have to mine. But it is necessary to the happiness of man, that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe.

It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime. He takes up the trade of a priest for the sake of gain, and, in order to qualify himself for that trade, he begins with a perjury. Can we conceive anything more destructive to morality than this?

Soon after I had published the pamphlet *Common Sense*, in America, I saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion. The

adulterous connection of church and state, wherever it had taken place, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, had so effectually prohibited, by pains and penalties, every discussion upon established creeds, and upon first principles of religion, that until the system of government should be changed, those subjects could not be brought fairly and openly before the world; but that whenever this should be done, a revolution in the system of religion would follow. Human inventions and priest-craft would be detected; and man would return to the pure, unmixed, and unadulterated belief of one God, and no more.

The Social Contract

Jean Jacques Rousseau

More than anyone else, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) tested the outer limits of Enlightenment thought and went on to criticize its very foundations. Born in Geneva, he spent much of his life in France (mainly in Paris), where he became one of the philosophes who contributed to the *Encyclopedia*. Yet he also undermined Enlightenment thought by holding that social institutions had corrupted people and that human beings in the state of nature were purer, freer, and happier than they were in modern civilization. This line of thought provided a foundation for the growth of Romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rousseau's most important political work was *The Social Contract* (1762), in which he argued for popular sovereignty. In the following selection from that work, Rousseau focuses on what he considers the fundamental argument of the book—the passage from the state of nature to the civil state by means of the social contract.

CONSIDER: *Rousseau's solution to the main problem of The Social Contract; the advantages and disadvantages of the social contract; what characteristics of Enlightenment thought are reflected in this selection.*

"The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before." This is the fundamental problem of which *The Social Contract* provides the solution.

The clauses of this contract are so determined by the nature of the act that the slightest modification would make them vain and ineffective; so that, although they have perhaps never been formally set forth, they are everywhere the same and everywhere tacitly admitted

SOURCE: Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses* (London: J. M. Dent, Everyman Library, 1913), pp. 14–15, 18–19.

and recognised, until, on the violation of the social compact, each regains his original rights and resumes his natural liberty, while losing the conventional liberty in favour of which he renounced it.

These clauses, properly understood, may be reduced to one—the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community; for, in the first place, as each gives himself absolutely, the conditions are the same for all; and, this being so, no one has any interest in making them burdensome to others.

Moreover, the alienation being without reserve, the union is as perfect as it can be, and no associate has anything more to demand: for, if the individuals retained certain rights, as there would be no common superior to decide between them and the public, each, being on one point his own judge, would ask to be so on all; the state of nature would thus continue, and the association would necessarily become inoperative or tyrannical.

Finally, each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody; and as there is no associate over whom he does not acquire the same right as he yields others over himself, he gains on equivalent for everything he loses, and an increase of force for the preservation of what he has.

If then we discard from the social compact what is not of its essence, we shall find that it reduces itself to the following terms—

Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.



The passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man, by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and giving his

actions the morality they had formerly lacked. Then only, when the voice of duty takes the place of physical impulses and right of appetite, does man, who so far had considered only himself, find that he is forced to act on different principles, and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations. Although, in this state, he deprives himself of some advantages which he got from nature, he gains in return others so great, his faculties are so stimulated and developed, his ideas so extended, his feelings so ennobled, and his whole soul so uplifted, that, did not the abuses of this new condition often degrade him below that which he left, he would be bound to bless continually the happy moment which took him from it for ever, and, instead of a stupid and unimaginative animal, made him an intelligent being and a man.

Let us draw up the whole account in terms easily commensurable. What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and an unlimited right to everything he tries to get and succeeds in getting; what he gains is civil liberty and the proprietorship of all he possesses. If we are to avoid mistake in weighing one against the other, we must clearly distinguish natural liberty, which is bounded only by the strength of the individual, from civil liberty, which is limited by the general will; and possession, which is merely the effect of force or the right of the first occupier, from property, which can be founded only on a positive title.

We might, over and above all this, add, to what man acquires in the civil state, moral liberty, which alone makes him truly master of himself; for the mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty. But I have already said too much on this head, and the philosophical meaning of the word liberty does not now concern us.



Visual Sources

Frontispiece of the *Encyclopédie*

This illustration (figure 8.1) appeared at the beginning of the 1751 edition to the *Encyclopédie*. A description guided the reader to its allegorical meanings. In the center and above all other figures stands Truth, “wrapped in a veil, radiant with a light which parts the clouds and disperses them.” Close on her left is Reason, who lifts a veil from Truth; below her, Philosophy pulls the veil away. Theology, holding a Bible, kneels at the feet of Truth. On Truth’s right is Imagination, “preparing to adorn and crown Truth.” Below them are figures representing Geometry, Physics, Astronomy, Optics, Botany, Chemistry, Agriculture, History, and the arts. At the bottom are practitioners who will use the guides above them to make progress. As a whole and

in its allegorical detail, this illustration represented the optimistic spirit of the *Encyclopédie* and the Enlightenment.

CONSIDER: The meaning of the Enlightenment as represented by this illustration; the connections between first, the ideals of truth, reason, and imagination, second, the sciences and arts, and third, the practitioners depicted in this illustration.

Experiment with an Air Pump

Joseph Wright

Few paintings provide a better image of the Enlightenment than *Experiment with an Air Pump* (1768) by the British artist Joseph Wright (figure 8.2). The experiment takes place in the

center of the picture; its apparent success is evidenced by the dead bird inside a closed glass bowl from which the air has been pumped out. The informally dressed experimenter is carefully observing his work. Around him are members of his family and some well-dressed friends.

The form and content of this picture symbolize the Enlightenment. A small source of light is sufficient to enlighten humanity and reveal the laws of nature. Science is not just for specialists but something amateurs can understand and practice to obtain practical results. That it is a British painting is particularly significant, for the English led in developing useful machines and were identified as having a more pragmatic approach to science and ideas than other peoples. The painting also reveals customary images of the sexes: the experimenter boldly forging on while to his left a friend or associate calmly explains what is happening to a woman and her daughter, whose sensibilities are as appropriately fragile as the dying bird—the main object of their concern.

CONSIDER: Any common themes in this painting and the documents by Kant, d'Holbach, and Diderot.

Propaganda and the Enlightened Monarch

Joseph II of Austria

Emperor Joseph II of Austria (1765–1790) is generally thought to have been one of the most enlightened eighteenth-century kings and indeed considered himself to be an enlightened monarch. Some of what this meant is indicated by this picture Joseph II had painted of himself (figure 8.3). It shows him plowing a field with a farmer and members of his court. To make sure he and his office were recognizable to viewers, Joseph remained appropriately dressed, including



FIGURE 8.1 (© The Granger Collection, New York)

wearing his powdered wig. This scene also affirms the growing interest in agricultural improvements during the eighteenth century, particularly among aristocratic innovators. Joseph II tells of some of his hopes in a number of letters excerpted here.

CONSIDER: What there was about this scene and these letters that could be considered enlightened; any inconsistencies with these statements and the reality of being a monarch; how Kant might have viewed Joseph II.

SOURCE: "Letters of Joseph II," in *The Pamphleteer*, vol. XIX (London, 1882), pp. 282, 288–290.



FIGURE 8.2 (© Art Resource, NY)



FIGURE 8.3 (© Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

Mr. Vice-Chancellor—The present system of taxation in my dominions, and the inequality of the taxes which are imposed on the nation, form a subject too important to escape my attention. I have discovered that the

principles on which it is founded are unsound, and have become injurious to the industry of the peasant; that there is neither equality, nor equity, between the hereditary provinces with each other, nor between in-

dividual proprietors, and therefore it can no longer continue.

With this view I give you the necessary orders to introduce a new system of taxation, by which the contribution, requisite for the wants of the state, may be effected without augmenting the present taxes, and the industry of the peasant, at the same time, be freed from all impediments.



Since my accession to the throne, I have ever been anxious to conquer the prejudices against my station, and have taken pains to gain the confidence of my people; I have several times since given proof, that the welfare of my subjects is my passion; that to satisfy it, I shun neither labor, nor trouble, nor even vexations, and reflect well on the means which are likely to promote my views; and yet in my reforms, I everywhere find opposition from people, of whom I least expect it.



Sir,—Till now the Protestant religion has been opposed in my states; its adherents have been treated like foreigners; civil rights, possession of estates, titles, and appointments, all were refused them.

I determined from the very commencement of my reign to adorn my diadem with the love of my people, to

act in the administration of affairs according to just, impartial, and liberal principles; consequently, I granted toleration, and removed the yoke which had oppressed the protestants for centuries.

Fanaticism shall in future be known in my states only by the contempt I have for it; nobody shall any longer be exposed to hardships on account of his creed; no man shall be compelled in future to profess the religion of the state, if it be contrary to his persuasion, and if he have other ideas of the right way of insuring blessedness.

In future my Empire shall not be the scene of abominable intolerance. Fortunately no sacrifices like those of Calas and Sirven have ever disgraced any reign in this country.

If, in former times, the will of the monarch furnished opportunities for injustice, if the limits of executive power were exceeded, and private hatred acted her part, I can only pity those monarchs who were nothing but kings.

Tolerance is an effect of that beneficent increase of knowledge which now enlightens Europe, and which is owing to philosophy and the efforts of great men; it is a convincing proof of the improvement of the human mind, which has boldly reopened a road through the dominions of superstition, which was trodden centuries ago by Zoroaster and Confucius, and which, fortunately for mankind, has now become the highway of monarchs. Adieu!



Secondary Sources

The Age of Enlightenment

Lester G. Crocker

The Enlightenment owes its substance to the thought of a relatively small group of eighteenth-century philosophes who came from many countries but were centered in France. Although they often argued among themselves, there was a set of approaches and propositions upon which most of them agreed. In the following selection Lester Crocker analyzes what unified the philosophes.

CONSIDER: How the primary sources support or contradict Crocker's interpretations; why the philosophes were so concerned with Christianity and the Church; the elements of this outlook that make the most sense to you for today's world.

What we call the Enlightenment gradually took shape in individual minds, over several generations, before it became conscious of itself as a movement during the

late 1740's. The principal galvanizing forces were Voltaire's ceaseless efforts in propagandizing and in whipping up "party" spirit, and the prolonged battle over the *Encyclopédie*, which served to unite many of the philosophes, as we call the writers who were engaged in furthering the goals of the Enlightenment. The philosophes were more often than not at odds among themselves on the answers they proposed to various questions or problems. Their solidarity lay in their awareness of a common foe—the *status quo*, and those who supported it, particularly Christianity and the Church. It lay also in their agreement on what the questions and problems were. The philosophes held certain ideas and aims in common. Among these were religious tolerance (belief in toleration of all ideas as well as personal tolerance was not universal among the philosophes); the conviction that human life can be improved through the improvement of society, since men are (more or less) shaped by laws and government; the idea that the enlightened group should influence those who govern, both directly and through public opinion. Their stance rested on a base of secularism and

humanism. Regardless of their varying religious beliefs, all the *philosophes* held that the proper business (if there was any) of organized churches was the salvation of souls. Science, government, economic policy, even (many thought) moral values and personal morality had to be freed from the dead hand of Christian authority. The Enlightenment was for unfettered critical reason, for social experience to indicate what course men should take in meeting the challenges involved in ameliorating human affairs. God, if he existed, had no influence on these—Bayle had demonstrated that, before the end of the seventeenth century. To the *philosophes*, churches were what we would now call “power groups” and, like all such groups, interested primarily in themselves. Revealed religions were fantasies or downright frauds. Christianity, especially, was hostile to the demands of human nature and pretended (the critics claimed) to direct men away from their self-interest in this life to a mythical paradise in a nonexistent life beyond. Reaction against the Christian world view and religious control of thought had been the very origin of the freethinking (*libertin*) movement in the seventeenth century. The *philosophes* were united by the conviction, above all else, that man must control his own destiny for the sole purpose of a better life on earth and that he must do everything possible to enlarge that control.

The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers

Carl L. Becker

Another point of interpretive division among historians of the Enlightenment centers on how modern and secular the philosophes were. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century historians argued that the philosophes were more modern than medieval and indeed drew more from the Classical pagan world than from the medieval world. This view still predominates among historians of the period. A famous challenge to this view was made more than sixty years ago by Cornell historian Carl Becker. His book, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers (1932), became the most influential book on the subject, although today it is no longer as popular as it once was. In the following selection from this work, Becker presents the substance of his thesis.

CONSIDER: *The ways in which the philosophes were more medieval than modern; the support Becker offers for his argument that there was much Christian philosophy in the*

philosophes' writings; how Kant would react to Becker's interpretation.

We are accustomed to think of the eighteenth century as essentially modern in its temper. Certainly, the *Philosophes* themselves made a great point of having renounced the superstition and hocus-pocus of medieval Christian thought, and we have usually been willing to take them at their word. Surely, we say, the eighteenth century was preëminently the age of reason, surely the *Philosophes* were a skeptical lot, atheists in effect if not by profession, addicted to science and the scientific method, always out to crush the infamous, valiant defenders of liberty, equality, fraternity, freedom of speech, and what you will. All very true. And yet I think the *Philosophes* were nearer the Middle Ages, less emancipated from the preconceptions of medieval Christian thought, than they quite realized or we have commonly supposed. . . .

But, if we examine the foundations of their faith, we find that at every turn the *Philosophes* betray their debt to medieval thought without being aware of it. They denounced Christian philosophy, but rather too much, after the manner of those who are but half emancipated from the “superstitions” they scorn. They had put off the fear of God, but maintained a respectful attitude toward the Deity. They ridiculed the idea that the universe had been created in six days, but still believed it to be a beautifully articulated machine designed by the Supreme Being according to a rational plan as an abiding place for mankind. The Garden of Eden was for them a myth, no doubt, but they looked enviously back to the golden age of Roman virtue, or across the waters to the unspoiled innocence of an Arcadian civilization that flourished in Pennsylvania. They renounced the authority of church and Bible, but exhibited a naïve faith in the authority of nature and reason. They scorned metaphysics, but were proud to be called philosophers. They dismantled heaven, somewhat prematurely it seems, since they retained their faith in the immortality of the soul. They courageously discussed atheism, but not before the servants. They defended toleration valiantly, but could with difficulty tolerate priests. They denied that miracles ever happened, but believed in the perfectibility of the human race. We feel that these Philosophers were at once too credulous and too skeptical. They were the victims of common sense. In spite of their rationalism and their humane sympathies, in spite of their aversion to hocus-pocus and enthusiasm and dim perspectives, in spite of their skepticism, their engaging cynicism, their brave youthful blasphemies and talk of hanging the last king in the entrails of the last priest—in spite of all of it, there is more of the Christian philosophy in the writings of the *Philosophes* than has yet been dreamt of in our histories.

SOURCE: Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*. Reprinted by permission of Yale University Press (New Haven, CT, 1932), pp. 29–31, 102–103.

Women in the Salons

Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser

As with the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution, the central figures of the Enlightenment were men. However, some women did directly participate as writers, and perhaps even more importantly, they participated as salonières—organizers of gatherings in the salons of homes where Enlightenment figures mingled with women and men of the social and cultural elite. Did the men of the Enlightenment try to change traditional views of women in the same way they tried to change traditional views about men and human nature? In the following selection Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser address this question.

CONSIDER: *Why, according to Anderson and Zinsser, there was no Enlightenment for women; ways in which the Enlightenment, in the long run, might have benefited women.*

... Parisian women established the institution of the salon by the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Aspiring hostesses competed to attract the talented, the witty, and the powerful to their homes. Outside the powerful French court and frequently in opposition to it, these new social circles offered women a new possibility: that of being a salonière, who by her graciousness and skill enabled conversation to flourish, artists to find patrons, and aristocrats to be amused. As a salonière, a woman brought the circles of power into her home. In the environment she created, she could help or hinder not only artistic and literary reputations, but political policies as well. The financial remedies for France's economy were debated in the salons; the king's choices of ministers were strongly influenced by the backing of powerful salonières. Salonières were privy to court secrets; salons were frequented by statesmen and ambassadors as well as intellectuals and artists. Salonières could make or break careers and often provided havens for new political philosophies and the new political opposition to the monarchy. ...

In the salon, a woman could meet and marry a man of superior social rank or wealth. In the salon, a woman of enterprise could make her way by attracting the famous. The salon became the base of influential women who swayed kings, governments, political opinion, and literary and artistic taste. ...

Rational conversation, sociability between women and men, delight in the pleasures of this world are the hallmarks of Enlightenment culture. The men who mingled with the Bluestockings and frequented the salons

were the men who produced the Enlightenment. It is a tragedy for women that these men, who were aided, sponsored, and lionized by the salonières, produced—with very few exceptions—art and writing which either ignored women completely or upheld the most traditional views of womanhood. Just as there was no Renaissance or Scientific Revolution for women, in the sense that the goals and ideals of those movements were perceived as applicable only to men, so there was no Enlightenment for women. Enlightenment thinkers questioned all the traditional limits on men—and indeed challenged the validity of tradition itself. They championed the rights of commoners, the rights of citizens, the rights of slaves, Jews, Indians, and children, but not those of women. Instead, often at great cost to their own logic and rationality, they continued to reaffirm the most ancient inherited traditions about women: that they were inferior to men in the crucial faculties of reason and ethics and so should be subordinated to men. In philosophy and in art, men of the Enlightenment upheld the traditional ideal of woman: silent, obedient, subservient, modest, and chaste. The salonière—witty, independent, powerful, well-read, and sometimes libertine—was condemned and mocked. A few Enlightenment thinkers did question and even reject subordinating traditions about women. But those who argued for a larger role for women—like the English-woman Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), the French Marquis de Condorcet in his *Admission of Women to Civic Rights* (1790), the German Theodor von Hippel in his *On the Civic Improvement of Women* (1792), the Spaniard Josefa Amar y Borbón in her *Discourse in Defense of Women's Talent and Their Capacity for Government and Other Positions Held by Men* (1786)—prompted outrage and then were forgotten. Instead, most philosophers and writers reiterated the most limiting traditions of European culture regarding women, often in works which condemned traditional behavior for men.

The Problem of Enlightened Absolutism

H. M. Scott

Historians have long debated exactly how much the Enlightenment influenced monarchs of the time. Traditionally, there has been considerable acceptance of the view that monarchs such as Joseph II of Austria and Frederick II of Prussia were enlightened. In recent decades this view was seriously

SOURCE: Excerpts from *A History of Their Own*, vol. II, by Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser. Copyright © 1988 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

SOURCE: H. M. Scott, "The Problem of Enlightened Absolutism," in *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Late Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. H. M. Scott. © 1990 H. M. Scott; published in the United States of America by the University of Michigan Press.

narrowed and questioned to the point where many historians felt that enlightened despotism and enlightened absolutism were no longer terms that could usefully be applied to these eighteenth-century monarchs. More recently, other historians have come to the conclusion that the term is useful. In the following selection H. M. Scott surveys this controversy and concludes that enlightened absolutism was real.

CONSIDER: *The characteristics of enlightened absolutism; why Joseph II (see the visual sources in this chapter) and Frederick II (see the primary sources in the preceding chapter) might be considered enlightened monarchs; how enlightened absolutism differs from seventeenth-century absolutism (see sources in Chapter 5).*

Few historical concepts have had their obituaries written more frequently than enlightened absolutism, yet so obstinately refuse to die. In its classical form, the theory of enlightened absolutism asserted that during the second half of the eighteenth century the domestic policies of most European states were influenced and even dictated by the ideas of the Enlightenment and were therefore sharply distinguished from what had gone before. Government became a systematic and rational attempt to apply the best recent knowledge to the task of ruling, while the main aim of internal policy came to be the improvement of educational opportunities, social conditions and economic life. . . .

Together, rulers and their influential advisers carried through a wide-ranging series of reforms, the principal inspiration for which was the political philosophy of the Enlightenment. Administrations and legal and fiscal systems were modernised; commercial and economic development was encouraged; efforts were made to improve agriculture and even to abolish the institution of serfdom; state control over the Catholic Church was extended and a determined attempt was made to channel some of its wealth into increased and improved pastoral activity; teaching in universities was brought up to date; and the provision of secondary and primary education was vastly increased. These reforms, and the amount of success achieved, were remarkable in the context of the later eighteenth century, and the sense of social responsibility which lay behind many of these measures was also novel and striking. Though the precise policies adopted varied from country to country, a common explanation was found in the movement of ideas known as the European Enlightenment, which was at its peak exactly when the policies of enlightened absolutism were being pursued: the middle decades of the eighteenth century until the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789.

During the past two generations, the historical reputation of enlightened absolutism has undergone remarkable vicissitudes, above all in Anglo-American historical

writing about later eighteenth-century Europe. It first rose to prominence during the 1930s, and for a generation thereafter was widely accepted among historians. By the 1960s, however, the tide was beginning to turn and the sceptics, who saw only the conventional aims of state-building in these policies and regarded the enlightened professions which accompanied them as mere window-dressing, were gaining the ascendant. The critics of enlightened absolutism argued that few monarchs, and certainly none of the major rulers, could afford to adhere blindly to an enlightened blueprint and ignore, or even neglect, the demands of self-defence. The competitive states-system within which the great powers operated required large and powerful armies and administrative and fiscal systems to support them. These priorities preempted much of the scope for enlightened reform. Above all, critics of the notion of enlightened absolutism argued that the success of these initiatives was often incomplete and could, at times, be very limited indeed. . . .

During the 1970s, the widespread assumption that enlightened absolutism was a fiction came to be challenged by a growing number of monographic studies of particular countries which make clear that the reforms of this period were influenced by ideas and were not simply another stage in the growth of the absolutist state. This trend has increased during the 1980s. . . .

[I]t has become clear that enlightened absolutism is not an idea in the mind of historians. The remarkable extent and the considerable success of the reforming initiatives is now established beyond question.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

1. What core of ideas and attitudes most clearly connects Enlightenment thinkers as revealed in these sources? How do these ideas relate to eighteenth-century society and institutions?
2. What policies would an eighteenth-century ruler have to pursue to fit to the greatest degree the ideas and assumptions of Enlightenment thinkers? What hindrances were faced by monarchs who wanted to be more enlightened?
3. What ideas and attitudes of Enlightenment thinkers do you think remain valid for the problems facing today's world? What Enlightenment ideas and attitudes no longer seem valid or appropriate?
4. In what ways do the sources support the argument that together, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment constitute a single intellectual revolution of great long-term significance?