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THE ENLIGHTENMENT: REASON, TOLERANCE, AND HUMANITY

COURSE GUIDE

Professor James Schmidt

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

The Enlightenment:
Reason, Tolerance, and Humanity

Professor James Schmidt

Boston University

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The Enlightenment:
Reason, Tolerance, and Humanity

Professor James Schmidt

Executive Producer

John J. Alexander

Executive Editor

Donna F. Carnahan

RECORDING

Producer - David Markowitz

Director - Matthew Cavnar

COURSE GUIDE

Editor - James Gallagher

Design - Edward White

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Cover image: The sun emblem on the grounds of Frederick II's palace Sanssouci in Potsdam, Germany, courtesy of James Schmidt.

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Course Syllabus

The Enlightenment: Reason, Tolerance, and Humanity

About Your Professor 4

Introduction 5

Lecture 1 The Question of Enlightenment 6

Lecture 2 Europe in the 1680s: The Political Origins of the Enlightenment 9

Lecture 3 Scientific Inquiry, Religious Controversy, and Political Dissent 12

Lecture 4 Voltaire and the Campaign Against Fanaticism 15

Lecture 5 The Emergence of the Public Sphere I: Academies and the Quest for Useful Knowledge 18

Lecture 6 The Emergence of the Public Sphere II: Coffeehouses and Salons 21

Lecture 7 The Emergence of the Public Sphere III: Secret Societies and the Clandestine Book Trade 24

Lecture 8 Diderot and the *Encyclopédie* 27

Lecture 9 Dreaming Philosophers and Crazy Musicians: Diderot's Later Career 30

Lecture 10 New Worlds, Strange Peoples, and Peculiar Customs 33

Lecture 11 The Scottish Enlightenment and the Origins of Social Theory 36

Lecture 12 Enlightenment in Germany: Lessing and Mendelssohn 39

Lecture 13 An Age of Revolutions 42

Lecture 14 The Legacies of the Enlightenment 45

Course Materials 48

Photo courtesy of James Schmidt

About Your Professor

James Schmidt

James Schmidt is a professor of history and political science at Boston University and specializes in the history of European political and social thought from the eighteenth century to the present. He is the author of *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism* (1985) and the editor of *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (1996).

He has a particular interest in debates over the nature, the limits, and the legacy of the Enlightenment and has published a series of articles in such journals as the *Journal of the History of Ideas, Journal of the History of Philosophy, Political Theory, History of Political Thought, American Political Science Review, Social Research,* and *Philosophy & Literature,* exploring the ways in which eighteenth-century thinkers understood the notion of "enlightenment" and the ways in which the Enlightenment has been approached by such twentieth-century thinkers as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault. He has received a number of grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and in 1999 was awarded the James L. Clifford Prize from the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.

At Boston University, he offers courses in the departments of History and Political Science and also teaches in the University Professors' Program, an interdisciplinary honors program. He has taught a wide range of courses in the areas of intellectual history and history of political thought, including such topics as the experiences of European intellectuals who sought refuge in the United States during the Second World War—particularly the relationship between the philosopher Theodor Adorno, the novelist Thomas Mann, and the composer Arnold Schoenberg during their exile in Hollywood in the 1940s, the ways in which art and literature respond to catastrophes, and recent controversies involving the application of the ideals of justice, liberty, and equality to such issues as censorship, affirmative action, and civil disobedience.

In addition to teaching at Boston University, he has been a Visiting Professor of Government and Social Studies at Harvard University and has been invited to lecture at a variety of American and European universities.

Photo courtesy of Professor James Schmidt

Photograph of the sun emblem in its original setting on the grounds of Frederick II's palace Sanssouci in Potsdam, Germany.

Introduction

The Enlightenment stands at the threshold of the modern age. It elevated the natural sciences to the preeminent position they enjoy in modern culture. It inaugurated a skepticism toward tradition and authority that decisively shaped modern attitudes in religion, morality, and politics. And it gave birth to a vision of history that saw man, through the unfettered use of his own reason, at last escaping that state of "immaturity" to which superstition, prejudice, and dogma had condemned him. The world in which we live is, for better or worse, in large part the result of the Enlightenment.

This course will explore this remarkable period. It will discuss the work of such influential thinkers as Voltaire, John Locke, Denis Diderot, Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, and Benjamin Franklin. It will also spend some time with less well-known, but no less influential, figures such as Joseph Priestly—a clergyman, scientist, and philosopher who was one of the most passionate defenders of the American Revolution in England—and the remarkable John Toland, a man whose writings on religion changed the way many Europeans thought about the Scriptures.

The Enlightenment involved more than simply books and ideas. To understand the Enlightenment we need to look not just at what people wrote but also at how they lived. During the eighteenth century, they began to congregate in coffeehouses, where they read newspapers, discussed politics, and created something known as "public opinion." Others of them began to meet in societies that were dedicated to the advancement of the sciences and there they explored how science might be put to work improving society. Still others began to meet in strange new secret societies—for example, the Masonic lodges that spread across Europe—where they attempted to put the ideals of equality and brotherhood into practice.

From the start, the Enlightenment has been controversial. In its own day, some argued that it threatened to undermine the moral and religious foundations on which society rested. It has not ceased to be controversial. In our day, some have charged that many of the maladies of modern societies can be traced to its shallow rationalism. This course offers a more balanced assessment of the Enlightenment, considering both its achievements and its shortcomings and focusing not only on its most important intellectual achievements but also on the strange and often colorful characters who populated it.

Lecture 1:
The Question of Enlightenment

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Dorinda Outram's *The Enlightenment,* pp. 1-14.

The European Enlightenment: A Preliminary Sketch

The period that we call "the Enlightenment" is typically seen as stretching from the 1680s to the end of the eighteenth century. It was an international movement that spread across Europe to the shores of the New World. These lectures will focus in particular on Great Britain—which was seen in the eighteenth century as the source of the most advanced ideas in science, philosophy, religion, and politics—and on France and those involved in the production of the great *Encyclopédie,* perhaps the most ambitious project of the period. We will also have something to say about the particular form that the Enlightenment took in Scotland and in Germany.

The Enlightenment was not simply a movement confined to the level of ideas. It also manifested itself on the level of new institutions. Thus, in addition to examining such important thinkers as Voltaire, Diderot, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant, we will consider such important institutions as scientific academies, salons, coffee houses, and secret societies and examine the new forms of social interaction they made possible.

The Enlightenment played a central role in shaping the world in which we live. This was an age that first raised science to the level of prestige that it now enjoys in our society. It was also an age that saw religious fanaticism as the greatest evil facing society and hailed religious toleration as the cornerstone on which any truly civilized government would have to rest. This was a period that gave a new urgency to the notion that individuals possessed certain rights and that these rights could and ought to be protected against rulers and enshrined in laws. Finally, the thinkers associated with the Enlightenment emphasized that this world should not simply be seen as a preparation for a happiness that would only come in the next. They maintained that being useful to one's fellow citizens was at least as important as service to God and that the pleasures of this world—friendship, sociability, and material comfort—were not to be dismissed.

How the Enlightenment Defined Itself

Those who participated in what we now call "the Enlightenment" were quite self-conscious about what it was that they were doing. They regularly employed terms like "enlightening the understanding" to describe the goal that directed their actions and, in an important series of essays sparked by a question in the *Berlin Monthly* of December 1783, engaged in a prolonged discussion of the question,"What is enlightenment?"

The most famous response came from thephilosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who defined enlightenment as "mankind's exit from a state of self-

incurred immaturity." For him, enlightenment consisted in having the courage to think for yourself, and—borrowing a phrase from the Roman poet Horace—he proclaimed that its motto was *Sapere Aude!* (literally, "Dare to Know!"), a phrase he translated as, "Have the courage to use your own understanding!"

When eighteenth-century thinkers spoke of "enlightenment," they understood it, first of all, as a process, rather than a historical period. It was an activity that opened onto an indefinite future: they assumed that the projects in which they were engaged would reach well beyond their own lifetimes. They were also clear that theirs was not the only age that could be described as an "Age of Enlightenment." Other ages before theirs had been "enlightened" (Greek antiquity was one example) and at least some of them saw history as a sequence of alternating ages of light and darkness. Finally, when thinkers associated with the French branch of the Enlightenment described what they were doing as "philosophy" and called themselves *philosophes* (philosophers) they stressed that their goals were not restricted to the domain of ideas. They sought to change the general mode of thinking, to bring about an alteration in the way in which people understood their place in the universe and how they thought about politics, about society, and about religion.

We will examine the world they were trying to change in the next lecture.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

What were some of the ways in which eighteenth-century thinkers characterized their age?

Suggested Reading

Outram, Dorinda. *The Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 1-14.

Other Readings of Interest

Anchor, Robert. *The Enlightenment Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

Cassirer, Ernst. *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952.

Kant, Immanuel. *Kant Political Writings*. Ed. H.S. Reiss. Trans. H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: The Sydicate of the University of Cambridge, 1991.

Kors, Alan Charles, ed. *The Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Schmidt, James, ed. *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Lecture 2: Europe in the 1680s: The Political Origins of the Enlightenment

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Margaret Jacob's *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents,* pp. 4-15.

Historians tend to see the Enlightenment as beginning in the 1680s, a decade that saw the publication of such seminal works as Pierre Bayle's *News of the Republic of Letters* (1684-1687), Sir Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687), and Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). It was also a decade marked by increasing political tensions, culminating in Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) and England's "Glorious Revolution" of 1688.

Louis XIV and the Ideal of Absolutism

In May 1682, Louis XIV (1638-1715) moved the French court to his new official residence at Versailles. The massive new residence aptly symbolized the power of the monarch hailed as the "Sun King." It provided offices for the bureaucracy required to administer the kingdom and also housed the aristocracy, who were now required to remain in residence at the court and to participate in the elaborate rituals that emphasized Louis preeminence. Just as the planets moved around the sun, so everything at Versailles proclaimed that Louis was the center of the political universe.

The policies Louis pursued have come to be known as "absolutism," an approach to government that sought to respond to the incessant religious and political conflicts of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Absolutism centralized power around the monarch in hopes of deterring threats from rebellious nobles, securing the state against the threat of religious strife, and building up the resources needed to exercise power in the international arena while extracting taxes from a resistant population.

In years before his move to Versailles, Louis had pursued an aggressive foreign policy designed to undermine his principal rival, the Spanish monarchy. He engaged in a number of campaigns against the Spanish Netherlands and, in 1672, began a series of wars against the Dutch Republic. The campaigns met with mixed success: he gained territory but made important enemies, particularly in Holland, which would become a gathering place for opponents of the French monarchy.

He also pursued a long campaign against French Protestants (known as Huguenots), who had been assured certain legal protections by the *Edict of Nantes* (1598). In 1685, Louis revoked the *Edict*, prompting an exodus of Huguenots to other parts of Europe and raising concerns among European Protestants regarding his ultimate designs.

Pierre Bayle and the Republic of Letters

Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) was one of the most important figures in the early

Enlightenment. A French Protestant who emigrated to Rotterdam in 1681, he gained early fame with his *Miscellaneous Thoughts on the Comet of 1680* (1681), a staggeringly digressive work that rewarded dedicated readers with truly shocking arguments: for example, the idea that a society of atheists is not only possible (a point many had denied), but might indeed be preferable to a society of religious fanatics. Even more famous was his great *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1696), a treasure-trove of information about heretics and freethinkers. Between 1684 and 1687, Bayle edited a critical review, *The News of the Republic of Letters*, which attempted to discuss every newly published book Bayle could lay his hands on. In addition to providing a means of keeping track of the flood of books that had begun to appear in Europe, the review signaled the birth of a new ideal: a cosmopolitan community of readers and writers, scattered in different countries, but bound as members of the so-called "Republic of Letters."

John Locke and the "Glorious Revolution"

The exiles who gathered in Holland would be joined in 1683 by the Englishman John Locke (1632-1704), who had left England in the wake of an aborted plot against the Catholic monarch Charles II (1630-1685). Locke was closely linked to Charles's opponents in Parliament, who sought to thwart the succession of Charles's brother James II (1663-1701) to the throne. Among the works that Locke brought with him into exile were his *Two Treatises of Government* (eventually published in 1690), which argued that political authority rests on the consent of the governed and defended the right of resistance against absolutist monarchs such as Charles and James. The birth of a son to James II in 1688 raised the specter of a permanent Catholic monarchy in England, allied with Louis XIV. In what came to be known as the "Glorious Revolution," Parliament invited the Dutch Stadtholder William of Orange (1650-1702), an opponent of Louis, to replace James on the throne, thus cementing England into the alliance against Louis. Locke returned in triumph, publishing the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689)—a work that has been called the "Bible of the Enlightenment"—and the *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689).

The policies of Louis XIV thus ultimately set in motion a constellation of forces that would fill Amsterdam with writers who opposed the French monarchy, place an implacable opponent of France on the English throne, and—once Locke's *Second Treatise* was translated into French—provide French opponents of the monarchy with one of their most powerful intellectual weapons.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How were the policies of Louis XIV viewed in the rest of Europe?
2. What concerns were shared by the various exiles who gathered in Holland during the 1680s?

Suggested Reading

Jacob, Margaret. *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.

Other Readings of Interest

Bayle, Pierre. *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Ed. Richard H. Popkin. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1991.

Beik, William, ed. *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

Locke, John. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Roger Woolhouse. New York: Penguin Classics, 1998. Originally published 1690.

———. *Letter Concerning Toleration*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983.

———. *Two Treatises of Government*. Ed. Mark Goldie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.

Lecture 3:
Scientific Inquiry, Religious Controversy, and Political Dissent

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Outram's *The Enlightenment,* pp. 31-46.

During the Enlightenment, we regularly encounter thinkers who combined an interest in the natural sciences with a concern for religious questions and an engagement in politics. Consider, for example, the polymath Joseph Priestly (1733-1804), a clergyman whose isolation of oxygen won him a reputation throughout Europe and whose impassioned defense of the French Revolution ultimately forced him to flee England for the wilds of America. In this lecture, we will examine some of the ways eighteenth-century thinkers moved between these three areas.

The Newtonian Revolution

It is difficult to overstate the impact of Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) on his age: Voltaire hailed him as "the greatest man who ever lived." His success in demonstrating that the movement of all bodies, whether on earth or in the heavens, could be reduced to a few simple formulas served as a model that scholars working in other fields would strive to emulate. But these laws also had, for Newton and many of his contemporaries, important theological implications. The elegant clockwork of the universe implied the existence of a divine artificer who designed the mechanism, set it into motion, and—for some, including Newton himself—still guided the movements of the planets.

Those who hailed him tended to draw radically different implications from his work—which, in fact, few of them actually read. His image of a complex and harmoniously ordered universe provided some readers with an allegory for the hierarchically structured society of pre-revolutionary Europe. Others, however, drew more radical implications from his work and, flirting with materialism, questioned whether there was any need for a God at all.

Deism and the Critique of "Priestcraft"

The term "Deism" is used to refer to thinkers who, while assuming that there was a divine agent responsible for ordering the universe, tended to reject most, if not all, of the specific articles of faith that defined particular forms of organized religion. Among the most influential representatives of this tendency was John Toland (1670-1722). His *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) used John Locke's theory of knowledge to argue that none of the original teachings of Christianity were contrary to reason and, hence, much current Christian doctrine was either the result of misunderstandings in the transmission of Jesus' original teachings or, more ominously, the product of the "Craft and Ambition of Priests and Philosophy."

The Impostor Theory

An even more radical account of the intertwining of religion and politics could be found in the most notorious text of the time, *The Treatise of the Three Imposters* (1719). The book was an odd pastiche that assembled fragments of texts by Spinoza, Hobbes, and others and argued that Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed were “imposters”—charlatans who made use of religion as a way of securing political power. Prior to its publication, the book had been circulated in manuscript form among Huguenot émigrés in Amsterdam, and tracing this history shows us the most radical face of the Enlightenment: the world of clandestine manuscripts, secret societies, and political dissenters.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What were some of the religious and political implications of Isaac Newton's work?
2. What were some of the differences between deism and the more radical critique of religion in the *Treatise of the Three Imposters?*

Suggested Reading

Outram, Dorinda. *The Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 31-46.

Other Readings of Interest

Anderson, Abraham. *Treatise of the Three Imposters and the Problem of Enlightenment*. London: Rowan & Littlefield, 1997.

Gay, Peter. *Deism: An Anthology*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1968.

Israel, Jonathan. *The Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Jacob, Margaret. *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981.

Lecture 4: Voltaire and the Campaign Against Fanaticism

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read the selected articles by Voltaire listed at the end of this lecture from the *Philosophical Dictionary.*

In this lecture, we turn from the world of clandestine manuscripts and radical enlighteners to consider the life and career of the figure who has come to epitomize the "high" Enlightenment: Voltaire (1694-1778).

A Sketch of His Life

"Voltaire" was the penname adopted by François-Marie Arouet, who was born into a prosperous middle-class family and gained early fame with his tragedy *Oedipus* (1718) and *La Henriade* (1728), an epic poem recounting the life of the French king Henry IV (1553-1610), whom he praised as an early advocate of religious toleration. Conflicts with authorities in Paris led to a brief imprisonment in the Bastille and an extended stay in England (1726-1729), which inspired his *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733). The publication of this work in French as the *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) sparked a controversy that drove Voltaire from Paris once again, this time to the chateau of his mistress the Madame du Châtelet (1706-1749), a gifted mathematician and translator with an interest in Newton's works. Their joint studies in science, biblical history, and philosophy would serve as the foundation for much of Voltaire's later work. After her death, Voltaire was briefly in residence at the court of Frederick II in Potsdam (1750-53) before moving to his own estate near Geneva, where he wrote his celebrated story *Candide* (1759) as well as the *Treatise on Toleration* (1763) and the *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), his most important contributions to his campaign against religious fanaticism. He made his triumphant return to Paris in 1778 and died a few months later at the age of 84.

Lessons from England

In the *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, Voltaire offered one of the first sketches of what would later be viewed as the tradition from which the Enlightenment had sprung. In a series of letters, he described English government and customs and offered brief summaries of what he saw as their most significant thinkers (Bacon, Locke, and Newton). But what impressed him most about England was the way the members of a diversity of religious sects lived peacefully side by side, putting into practice the ideal to which Voltaire would devote much of his life: toleration.

The Campaign Against Fanaticism

Throughout his life, Voltaire was haunted by the image of the religious fanaticism that culminated in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572), when some 3,000 Protestants were slaughtered in Paris within the space of a few days. In his *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764)—a witty and often caustic

discussion of religion and politics—he sought to bring about a revolution in the thinking of his countrymen by replacing fanaticism with that tranquility of mind that, in his view, was the fruit of philosophy. He also took up the cause of Jean Calas (1698-1762), a French Huguenot executed in 1762 for allegedly having murdered his son in order to prevent him from converting to Catholicism. For Voltaire, this miscarriage of justice illustrated the way in which the fever of fanaticism had corrupted the legal system. His energetic campaign succeeded in clearing Calas's name and in securing Voltaire's reputation as a tireless advocate of the cause of religious toleration.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What did Voltaire find striking about English culture and society?
2. What dangers did Voltaire see in the relationship between religion and politics in France?

Suggested Reading

Voltaire, Françoise-Marie Arouet de. “Democracy,” “Enthusiasm,” “Equality,” “Faith,” “Fanaticism,” “Fatherland,” “Fraud,” “Freedom of Thought,” “Morality,” “On Mr. Locke,” “Prejudices,” “Religion,” “Sect,” “Superstition,” “The Ecclesiastical Ministry,” “Theist,” “Tolerance,” and “Virtue.” *Philosophical Dictionary*. New York: Penguin, 1984.

Other Readings of Interest

Besterman, Theodore. *Voltaire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Redman, Ben Ray, ed. *The Portable Voltaire*. New York: Penguin, 1977.

Voltaire. *Political Writings*. Ed. David Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

———. *Treatise on Toleration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Lecture 5:
The Emergence of the Public Sphere I:
Academies and the Quest for Useful Knowledge

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe* edited by William Clark, Jan Golinski, and Simon Schaffer.

The Idea of the "Public Sphere"

The next three lectures will examine some of the institutions that aided the spread of enlightened ideas in Europe. Historians have come to see these institutions as part of the "public sphere," a domain in which private individuals came together to discuss matters of public concern. Examples of such institutions would include coffee houses, salons, Masonic lodges, societies for the reading and discussion of books and journals, as well as the topic of this lecture: societies for the dissemination of "useful knowledge."

The Origin of Scientific Academies: England vs. the Continent

In his *Letters Concerning the English Nation,* Voltaire noted an important difference between the Royal Society of London for the Promotion of Natural Knowledge (founded in 1660) and its French equivalent, the Academy of Sciences (founded 1666). The Academy of Sciences was a government agency whose members were appointed by the crown and who received pensions, while the Royal Society was royal in name only and relied on the voluntary contributions of its fellows, who joined it because of the status that membership conferred and the opportunities for sociability that it offered. Academies on the continent tended to follow the model of the French Academy of Sciences: they were part of the broader agenda of absolutism and testified to the power of the monarchy. British scientific societies, in contrast, came about because of the desire of individuals to discuss questions of common interest. One of the most influential was the Lunar Society of Birmingham (so named because it met on the Monday nearest the full moon), which included such important individuals as the engineers Matthew Boulton (1728-1809) and James Watt (1736-1819), the pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgewood (1730-1795), the physician and inventor Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), and the scientist, clergyman, and philosopher Joseph Priestly (1733-1804).

The Function of Academies

Regardless of their origins, scientific academies fulfilled a number of important functions. They provided support, either financial or collegial, for individuals interested in pursuing research. They also provided a vehicle for circulating useful knowledge to a broader community. And, finally, they offered a means of directing research toward particular questions. One way of doing this was through competitions that solicited essays in response to particular questions.

Benjamin Franklin and the Lightning Rod

Benjamin Franklin's famous kite experiment and his subsequent invention of the lightning rod can serve as an illustration of how scientific knowledge circulated through this new public sphere. Franklin's experiments were, in part, prompted by his reading of Newton's *Opticks* (1704), a work that—unlike his *Principia* (*Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*)—was written in English rather than Latin and did not require a mastery of calculus. Speculating that electricity might be one of those fluids Newton had described as much "subtler" than air, Franklin designed a set of experiments that might explore how electricity penetrated and "flowed" through other bodies. He summarized these experiments (some imagined, some actually executed) in reports sent to Europe between 1747 and 1749, which were eventually published as *Experiments and Observations in Electricity* (1751). The attempt to draw connections between lightning and electricity followed Newton's example in attempting to show the continuity between events that could be experimentally produced through mechanical devices and events that took place, on an incomparably greater scale, in nature itself. The lightning rod, the principal practical result of these experiments, illustrates rather nicely the hopes of the Age of Enlightenment: here was a case where scientific inquiry, carried out by an individual with connections to an international community of scholars, produced an outcome that brought great blessings to mankind.

Questions

1. What were some of the benefits of being a member of a scientific academy?
2. How did Franklin's experiments in electricity draw on the work of Newton?

Suggested Reading

Clark, William, Jan Golinski, and Simon Schaffer, eds. *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Other Readings of Interest

Cohen, I. Bernard. *Benjamin Franklin's Science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Condorcet, Marie Jean. "Historical Picture of the Human Mind," selections. *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*. Ed. Isaac Kramnick. New York: Penguin, 1995, pp. 64-69.

Melton, James van Horn. *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 1-17.

Newton, Isaac. *Opticks: Or, a Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections, and Colours of Light*. New York: Dover Publications, 1987.

Priestly, Joseph. "History and Present State of Electricity," selections. *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*. Ed. Isaac Kramnick. New York: Penguin, 1995, pp. 69-73.

Uglow, Jenny. *Lunar Men: Five Friends Whose Curiosity Changed the World*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

Lecture 6: The Emergence of the Public Sphere II: Coffeehouses and Salons

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read James Van Horn Melton's *Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe,* pp. 197-251.

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of the emerging public sphere by examining two important venues where private individuals could gather to discuss matters of public concern: coffeehouses and salons.

The World of the Coffeehouse

The first European coffeehouse was established in Venice in 1645 and quickly spread throughout Europe for the next fifty years. They swiftly took hold in Paris, the home to the Procope (frequented by Voltaire and Diderot) and the Régence (the site of Diderot's great dialogue *Rameau's Nephew*). Testimony to the spread of the craze to Germany can be found in Johann Sebastian Bach's *Coffee Cantata* of 1723, which recounts the story of a middle-class Leipzig family whose daughter refuses to marry anyone who won't let her drink coffee. But it was in England where they had the greatest impact, with over 2,000 coffeehouses springing up in London before the end of the seventeenth century.

Critics of English coffeehouses argued that they undermined traditional respect for the king (since coffee drinkers, unlike ale drinkers, did not toast the king), emasculated men (by drying up their seminal fluids), and tended to support an atmosphere of sedition. Absurd though these charges may seem, they do point to an important feature of coffeehouses: from the start, they offered a place where political news could be disseminated and discussed, in large part because of the ready availability of newspapers within the coffeehouses. The development of a culture particular to coffeehouses was fostered by two important journals: the *Tattler* (1709-1711) and the *Spectator* (1711-1712), edited by Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Richard Steele (1672-1729). Providing a running commentary of topics under discussion in coffeehouses, these journals served both to tie individual coffeehouses into a network and to articulate a unique set of values associated with those inhabitants of coffeehouses who valued "calm and ordinary life."

The Salon and the Salonnière

As the craze for coffeehouses was sweeping Europe, a gathering place of another sort was taking shape in Paris: the salon. The term was originally applied to social gatherings at which the aristocracy gambled or engaged in other pastimes, but by the middle of the eighteenth century, it had become an institution that was increasingly involved in production, exchange, and the transmission of ideas associated with the Enlightenment. This change was the result of a confluence of interests between the philosophes—the group of intellectuals involved in the production of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*—and salonnières—aristocratic women who, seeking to further their own education,

began inviting philosophes to their social gatherings. As a result of this collaboration, the salon became the place where many of the most important works associated with the French Enlightenment were read aloud and discussed. Indeed, in a state which had only a few venues for publication, all of which were subject to censorship, the reading of these works in the salon might be the only “publication” they would receive until after the French Revolution, when some of the manuscripts first read in salons finally appeared in print.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why were coffeehouses so controversial?
2. What interest did aristocratic women have in forming a salon? What benefits did it provide for philosophes?

Suggested Reading

Melton, James Van Horn. *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 197-251.

Other Readings of Interest

Goodman, Dena. *Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Kale, Steven. *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004.

Rousseau, Jean Jacques. "Discourse on the Arts and Sciences," selections. *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*. Ed. Isaac Kramnick. New York: Penguin, 1995, pp. 363-369.

Lecture 7:
The Emergence of the Public Sphere III:
Secret Societies and the Clandestine Book Trade

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read James Van Horn Melton's *Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe,* pp. 81-122 and 252-272.

Our tour of the eighteenth-century public sphere concludes with an examination of one of its more peculiar aspects: some of its most important institutions could only function in secret. We will first discuss the host of secret societies—most importantly the network of Masonic lodges—that sprung up in Europe during the eighteenth century. Then we will examine the underground trade in "forbidden books"—a classification that included some of the Enlightenment's most important books, as well as some of its naughtiest.

Secret Societies

The Enlightenment was a remarkably sociable time, with a myriad of societies—some public, some private. While many of these societies made no particular efforts to conceal themselves from public view, others were almost obsessive in their secrecy, including the Berlin "Wednesday Society," a group of prominent members of the Prussian bureaucracy, important clergymen, and leading publishers and philosophers who met in secret to discuss "the enlightenment and the welfare of mankind." The group's concern with secrecy can be explained in part by the sensitive nature of the topics debated, which included such issues as the question of whether censorship was needed, how the legal code might be reformed, and the advisability of doing away with aristocratic privileges. Another impetus toward secrecy could be found in the very membership of the group: prominent figures such as these could engage in a free and open discussion of such issues only if there was a way to test new ideas in a sympathetic setting before submitting them to the scrutiny of others. Thus, though the Wednesday Society may have been a secret society, its aims were avowedly "public minded"—its goal was the enlightenment of its members and of the citizenry.

Perhaps the most famous eighteenth-century secret societies were the various lodges associated with the Masonic movement. The origins of the movement can be traced to the middle of the seventeenth century when some guilds of stonemasons, faced with a shortage of members, began to admit non-masons as a way of generating income to fund the various services they provided to members and their families. The various symbolic trappings of the older "operative guilds"—as well as their emphasis on secrecy—were carried over into the "non-operative" lodges. After the founding of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, the movement spread to the Continent and it is estimated that by 1750 there were some 50,000 members in all the major cities of Europe. Within the Masonic movement, secrecy served as a way of binding together individuals who may have had little else in common except for their participation in common rituals. The emphasis on secrecy also testified to a

hostility toward a world that, for many masons, was inferior in significant ways to the fraternal and spiritual resources provided by the lodges, which put into practice what had only been imagined in earlier dreams of a cosmopolitan "republic of letters." In short, here was a truly international community, embracing all those who shared the ideals of brotherhood and enlightenment.

"Philosophical Books" and the Clandestine Book Trade

The eighteenth century saw a dramatic change in both the number of types of books as well as changes in reading habits. The result was a demand for new reading materials and the emergence of an international book market aimed at meeting the growing demand for books. Those engaged in the international book trade wound up wrestling with and, in many cases, breaking down local barriers, whether in the form of official censors or the resistance of local guilds. What emerged was, in effect, a double market: some works could be traded freely while others—either pirated editions of otherwise unobjectionable books or books that had been banned by local authorities—circulated illegally.

The book trade had a special term for those books that could potentially cause trouble: they were called "philosophical books." While some of these books—for example, Voltaire's more controversial writings—were, in fact, works that we would today classify as "philosophy," the category also includes such works as the anecdotes regarding the Countess du Barry, an account of sexual scandals in the court of Louis XV, and *Therese the Philosophe,* an outrageous combination of pornography and philosophy that recounts the philosophical and sexual awakening of a young woman.

With this bizarre world of secret societies and illegal books, our tour of the eighteenth-century public sphere comes to a close. Over the next several lectures, we will see how one man made use of the opportunities this world provided and produced some of the Enlightenment's most important and innovative works. His name was Denis Diderot.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How did eighteenth-century publishers attempt to get around the restrictions posed by censors?
2. Why did some societies cultivate a cult of secrecy?

Suggested Reading

Melton, James Van Horn. *Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 81-122 and 252-272.

Other Readings of Interest

Birtsch, Gunter. "The Berlin Wednesday Society." Ed. James Schmidt. *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 235-252.

Darnton, Robert. *Forbidden Best-Sellers in Pre-Revolutionary France*. New York: Norton, 1996.

Jacob, Margaret C. *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 143-161 and 215-224.

Voltaire, Françoise-Marie Arouet de. "Liberty of the Press." *Philosophical Dictionary*. New York: Penguin, 1984.

Lecture 8:
Diderot and the *Encyclopédie*

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Robert Darnton's "Philosophers Trim the Tree of Knowledge" in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Essays,* pp. 191-214.

Denis Diderot (1713-1784) was perhaps the most brilliant and inventive of the philosophes. He was the author of works whose novelty and creativity still dazzle readers and he was the driving force behind the Enlightenment's most ambitious project: the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772). In this lecture, we will examine his twenty-five year struggle to produce that great work.

Diderot and the Origins of the *Encyclopédie*

Diderot was born into a family of pious Catholics and, apparently planning to become a priest, journeyed to Paris to attend seminary. He soon abandoned these plans, secretly married, and set out on a career as a "man of letters." In October 1747, he and the mathematician Jean le Rond D'Alembert (1717-1783) were hired by a Parisian publisher as co-editors for an ambitious project that had begun as an attempt to translate Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopedia* (1727) into French, but which had now evolved into a plan for a completely new reference work. The initial plan called for a ten-volume work to be completed by the end of 1754, but it would not be until 1772 that Diderot could rest from his labors.

The *Encyclopédie* sought to banish obscurantism and superstition and to provide its readers with useful knowledge. As a result, each volume sparked controversy. Complaints about some of Diderot's earlier works resulted in his arrest in the summer of 1749, but the publishers of the *Encyclopedia*, eager to see their project completed, successfully negotiated his release. In response to the furor that resulted from his article on "Geneva"—which was attacked both by the clergy of Geneva and by Diderot's friend Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)—D'Alembert resigned from the project in 1757. In 1759, permission to publish the *Encyclopédie* was officially revoked, thus apparently dooming the project. However, a compromise was worked out that allowed Diderot to complete the remaining volumes and deliver them to subscribers in a single batch. The completion of the first edition was only the beginning of the book's history: in the years to come, reprinted editions from other publishers would flood the market, spreading the book far beyond its initial group of subscribers.

"Changing the General Way of Thinking"

The *Encyclopédie* is not only one of the greatest reference works of its day, it was also a *"machine de guerre"* ("weapon of war") that rejected appeals to tradition, attacked ignorance and superstition, and proclaimed that man—active, productive, scientific man—was the proper measure of all things. In the "Preliminary Discourse" to the work, D'Alembert traced the various branches of human knowledge back to the origins, showing how all derives from either sensation or reflection and suggesting that application of reflection

to itself, separated from any contact with sensory experience, breeds phantoms in the brain that, in their most dangerous form, lead to religious enthusiasm and fanaticism.

Diderot offered his own view of the goals of the project in his article on the *Encyclopédie* in the work itself, placing particular emphasis on the relationship of the work to its time. Diderot saw his century as an age of "philosophers," not an age of "geniuses." While the "geniuses" of the seventeenth century had been able to attain insights that reached far beyond their times, their ideas had yet to be organized and disseminated to a broader population. This would be the task of the *Encyclopédie* that brought together a team of collaborators who could present past discoveries in an orderly fashion and thus lay the foundation that made future progress possible. It could also serve as a protection against future ages of obscurantism by assuring that hard-won insights would not be lost.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What differences did Diderot see between the “geniuses” of the seventeenth century and the “philosophers” of the eighteenth century?
2. How did D’Alembert propose to organize human knowledge?

Suggested Reading

Darnton, Robert. “Philosophers Trim the Tree of Knowledge.” *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1985, pp. 191-214.

Other Readings of Interest

D’Alembert, Jean le Rond. “Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopédie.” *The Encyclopédie*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995.

Darnton, Robert. *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Diderot, Denis. “The Encyclopédie.” *Rameau’s Nephew and Other Works*. Trans. Ralph H. Bowen. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2001.

Furbank, P.N. *Diderot*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1992.

Lecture 9: Dreaming Philosophers and Crazy Musicians: Diderot's Later Career

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Denis Diderot's *D'Alembert's Dream* and *Rameau's Nephew* in *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works,* translated by Ralph H. Bowen.

While Diderot was best known in his own day for his labors on behalf of the *Encyclopédie*, his reputation today largely rests on a remarkable series of works that enjoyed little, if any, circulation during his own lifetime, but which are now counted among the greatest achievements of the French Enlightenment. In this lecture, we will discuss two of them.

D'Alembert's Dream

The brilliant dialogue *D'Alembert's Dream* was begun sometime around 1769 and circulated among subscribers to Baron Grimm's *Literary Correspondence* in the early 1780s, but would not appear in print until 1830. It falls into three parts. The first consists of a discussion in which Diderot defends a thoroughgoing materialism against the objections of his friend D'Alembert, who—despite certain reservations—continues to defend a dualistic view that distinguishes mind and matter. In the dazzling second part, the salonnière Julie de Lepinasse and the physician Théophile de Bordeu attempt to make sense of the ravings of the sleeping D'Alembert, whose dreams have now been taken over by the bizarre implications of Diderot's materialist philosophy. The last part of the dialogue takes place the next morning as Bordeu and Julie explore the moral implications of Diderot's materialism.

Stylistically, the dialogue is one of Diderot's greatest achievements. It eschews a didactic presentation of his philosophical position in favor of a phantasmagoria in which Diderot's position is articulated by the sleeping D'Alembert, reported by Julie, and interpreted by Doctor Bordeu. The issues explored by the partners in this peculiar conversation run the gamut from speculations about whether it is possible for stones to think, the fragility of self-identity, whether there is a place for God in a thoroughly materialist universe, and what moral strictures, if any, can apply in the area of sexual relations. In some of his most adventurous moments, Diderot anticipates later developments in the area of evolutionary biology and artificial intelligence.

Rameau's Nephew

The only thing that prevents us from viewing *D'Alembert's Dream* as Diderot's most audacious dialogue is the fact that he would soon trump it with an even greater achievement: *Rameau's Nephew*. Begun as early as 1761, this work did not see the light of day until 1805, when it appeared in a German translation by the great German poet and dramatist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), the first of many later admirers of the work. *Rameau's Nephew* is a dialogue between two figures—one, a philosopher, is simply designated as "me" (Moi), the other, designated "him" (Lui), is Jean-François Rameau, the nephew of the great composer Jean-Philippe

Rameau. The nephew is a social parasite condemned to scratch out a living by serving the enemies of the *Encyclopédie*. While talented musically, he is a decidedly unstable fellow who cares only about himself and about filling his belly. But he is also, as the philosopher comes to realize, an individual with a remarkably sharp insight into the hypocrisy of society. Thus, in Rameau, the philosopher has more than met his match and in this dialogue Diderot stages what is perhaps the greatest philosophical confrontation of the Enlightenment: for while the good philosophe cannot accept the morality that Rameau espouses, he cannot reject it out of hand. Though the dialogue ends without a clear victor, the work is an impressive testimony to Diderot's loyalty to the fundamental convictions of the Enlightenment: for here is an exercise in critique that is so courageous and uncompromising that it does not hesitate in calling even the hopes of the Enlightenment itself into question.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What were the main differences between views of Diderot and D'Alembert on the relationship of mind and matter?
2. Why is the figure of the nephew of Rameau so fascinating and so troubling for the "Moi" in *Rameau's Nephew*?

Suggested Reading

Diderot, Denis. "D'Alembert's Dream" and "Rameau's Nephew." *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*. Trans. Ralph H. Bowen. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2001.

Other Readings of Interest

Anderson, Wilda. *Diderot's Dream*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

O'Gorman, Donal. *Diderot the Satirist: Le Neveu de Rameau and Related Works*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.

Rex, Walter E. *Diderot's Counterpoints*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998, pp. 163-197 and 252-306.

Lecture 10:
New Worlds, Strange Peoples, and Peculiar Customs

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Dorinda Outram's *The Enlightenment,* pp. 63-79.

In this lecture, we will examine the interest of Enlightenment thinkers in the encounters between European explorers and the indigenous peoples of North America and the South Pacific. We will also examine one last dialogue by Diderot, the *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*, which examines some of the implications of this historic encounter.

Raynal, Diderot, and *The History of the Two Indies*

Despite its somewhat forbidding title, *The Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of Europeans in the Two Indies* (1770) was one of the great publishing successes of the eighteenth century. Officially, its author was Guillaume Thomas François Raynal (1713-1796), a regular visitor to Enlightenment salons and a writer employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The work contained a wealth of information about the geography of the New World and the Pacific, French commercial relations with the East and West Indies, the spread of trade and commerce, and the customs and beliefs of non-Europeans. It also contained striking condemnations of slavery and colonialism, polemics aimed at demonstrating that the "savages" that populated the New World were happier and more virtuous than Europeans, and discussions of their religious beliefs that raised troubling questions about the rationality of Christianity. These more adventurous speculations came from the pen of Raynal's unlisted collaborator: Diderot.

The European Obsession with the Exotic

The success of *The History of the Two Indies* testifies to the widespread interest of Europeans in the reports that travelers had brought back about the strange lands and peoples they encountered on their voyages. For some time, the indigenous peoples and the wildlife of North America had fascinated Europeans. The naturalist Georges-Louis Buffon (1708-1788) had maintained that North American animals were smaller and inferior versions of European species; the virtues of American wildlife were vigorously defended by a young Virginian naturalist named Thomas Jefferson.

What attracted the greatest attention, however, was the island of Tahiti, which was first encountered by European explorers in the 1720s in the course of their fruitless search for the Terra Australis Incognita—the great "unknown southern continent" that would serve as the goal of such explorers as the Frenchman Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811) and the British seaman James Cook (1728-1779). In Bougainville's report, Tahiti emerges as a paradise distinguished by natural beauty, natural abundance, and strikingly relaxed attitudes towards sexual mores. Accounts of the seemingly happy lives lived by "savages" prompted some Europeans—most famously Jean-

Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) in *Discourse on the Origins on Inequality* (1755)—to question whether civilization was a blessing or a curse.

Diderot's *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*

Diderot wrestled with these issues in yet another of his unpublished dialogues, the *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage* (begun in 1772 but not published until 1798). The first part of the work consists of a stunning denunciation of European colonialism, a denunciation that Diderot puts into the mouth of an elderly Tahitian who addresses Bougainville's men as they depart for Europe. The second half, which recounts a conversation between a Chaplain from Bougainville's ship and a Tahitian, mounts a witty attack on European sexual mores.

Questions

1. How did enlightened Europeans attempt to understand the peoples that were encountered during the European voyages in the Pacific?
2. What stance did Diderot take toward European colonization in his *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*?

Suggested Reading

Outram, Dorinda. *The Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 63-79.

Other Readings of Interest

Diderot, Denis. *Political Writings*. Eds. John Hope Mason and Robert Wolkler. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

———. "Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage." *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*. Trans. Ralph H. Bowen. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2001.

Raynal, Guillaume T. *Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1970.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse on Inequality*. Trans. Maurice Cranston. New York: Penguin, 1985.

Lecture 11: The Scottish Enlightenment and the Origins of Social Theory

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Nicholas Phillipson's "The Scottish Enlightenment" in *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Roy Porter and Mikulás Teich, eds.).

During the eighteenth century, there was a remarkable flourishing of intellectual activity in Scottish universities. Leading figures in the Scottish Enlightenment included Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), David Hume (1711-1776), Adam Smith (1723-1790), and Adam Ferguson (1723-1816). While thinkers associated with the Scottish Enlightenment pursued a broad range of interests, they had a particular concern with moral philosophy, a discipline that—at the time—ranged across much of what would later become the concerns of politics, economics, and social theory.

Wicked Bees and Benevolent Humans: Mandeville vs. Hutcheson

While Francis Hutcheson is generally viewed as the founder of the Scottish moral philosophy, the provocation for his most important early writing could be found in the work of Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), the infamous author of the satirical poem "The Grumbling Hive or Knaves Turned Honest," which was first published in 1705 and reissued in ever-expanding editions in 1714, 1723, and 1732 as *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. Mandeville insisted that what moralists had long classified as vices—for example, envy, greed, pride—turned out to be the very things that made society prosper. In other words, when properly channeled, private vices yielded public benefits. Hutcheson criticized Mandeville on two fronts. He argued that Mandeville's account of human nature was overly rationalist and individualistic, and hence ignored the role of the sentiment of "benevolence" in ordering society and further suggested that Mandeville's view of ethics was overly traditionalist: to the extent that greed or envy tend to promote the public good, we should regard them as "virtuous" rather than "vicious."

Adam Smith and the Impartial Spectator

While Adam Smith is justly famous for his great *Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), he was also the author of one of the period's most important contributions to moral philosophy: the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). In this work, Smith explored the way in which individuals come to judge the conduct and character of both themselves and others. His point of departure owed much to Hutcheson. Smith argued that the origins of morality are to be found in our sympathetic identification with others. But to a much greater extent than Hutcheson, he emphasized the role of society in refining our moral judgments. We learn how to judge our own actions, he argued, by internalizing those judgments that we make of others and which we imagine that others are making of us. In this process, society functions as a "mirror" in which we see our own actions reflected and, through it, we come to regard our actions from the standpoint of an "impartial spectator."

Commerce, Virtue, and Liberty

In the opening chapters of the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith framed an account of the market that owed much to Mandeville. Like Mandeville's vicious bees, individuals in a market society speak the language of self-interest, not the language of benevolence. From this he developed his famous argument that statesmen who seek to increase the wealth of their nations would be well-advised to restrict their activity to the administration of justice, the defense of their realms, and to securing the general framework that would enable individuals to have the freedom to order their own affairs.

Smith and his colleagues, however, were acutely aware that commercial progress was not without its costs. While the division of labor may increase economic productivity, Smith noted that it also tended to undermine an individual's capacity for functioning as an active member of society. An even more critical assessment of the pitfalls of commercial societies could be found in Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), which explored the ways in which economic advancement might bring with it a loss of civic involvement and political engagement.

Questions

1. How did Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Smith differ in their treatment of the relationship between benevolence and self-interest?
2. What problems did Smith and Ferguson see in commercial societies?

Suggested Reading

Phillipson, Nicholas. “The Scottish Enlightenment.” *The Enlightenment in National Context*. Eds. Roy Porter and Mikulás Teich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Other Readings of Interest

Broadie, Alexander, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Hutcheson, Frances. “System of Moral Philosophy,” selections. *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*. Ed. Isaac Kramnick. New York: Penguin, 1995, pp. 275-280.

Smith, Adam. “The Theory of Moral Sentiments,” selections. *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*. Ed. Isaac Kramnick. New York: Penguin, 1995, pp. 280-287.

———. “Wealth of Nations,” selections. *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*. Ed. Isaac Kramnick. New York: Penguin, 1995, pp. 505-515.

Lecture 12:
Enlightenment in Germany:
Lessing and Mendelssohn

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan the Wise,* translated by Ronald Schechters.

In this lecture, we will examine the friendship between two of the most important figures in the German Enlightenment: the writer Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) and the great Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786). Their friendship would yield what is perhaps the greatest of all literary defenses of religious toleration: Lessing's "dramatic poem" *Nathan the Wise* (1779).

Mendelssohn and Lessing: Their Friendship

Lessing was born in 1729, the son of a Lutheran minister, and studied theology, then medicine, and then philosophy in Leipzig. He was, however, soon drawn to the theater and moved to Berlin in 1748 intent on pursuing a career as a man of letters. Mendelssohn had come to the same city in 1743 as an impoverished student of the Talmud. Within a decade he had become a master of German prose and, at the time of his first encounter with Lessing in 1754, was readying his first work, the *Philosophical Dialogues* (1755), for publication. The two friends were drawn into the circle of the Berlin publisher Friedrich Nicolai (1733-1811) and were soon writing reviews for his literary journals.

Mendelssohn on Toleration and Religious Diversity

By the end of the 1760s, Mendelssohn was famous throughout Europe, largely thanks to the success of his *Phaedon* (1767)—a widely translated dialogue on the immortality of the soul that was modeled on Plato. However, his fame brought persistent questions as to why he, an obviously enlightened man, continued to practice Judaism, a religion widely regarded at the time as rife with superstition. The most famous of these challenges came in 1769 from the young Swiss theologian Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801).

In responding to these challenges, Mendelssohn was forced to grapple with central questions about the Enlightenment ideal of religious toleration. Arguing against views of toleration that tended to reduce religions to a few commonly held beliefs, Mendelssohn insisted that the true goal of toleration was to foster ties between different religions while still preserving the particular identities of individual faiths. It was this vision that would play a major role in *Nathan the Wise*.

Nathan the Wise

The most famous scene in Lessing's play is directly modeled on Lavater's challenge: Saladin, the learned Muslim ruler of twelfth-century Jerusalem, challenges the enlightened Jew Nathan to explain which is the true religion: Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. Nathan answers with the fable of the three rings. An old man, unable to decide to which of his three sons he will leave a ring that has the power to make its owner beloved by men and by God,

decides to have exact copies of the rings made and, prior to his death, gives a ring to each of his sons. There is no way of distinguishing the original ring from the copies, just as—in Lessing's view—there is no way of learning, from history, which religion is the true one. The only way to prove which ring is the true one is to observe the results that each ring brings about, and each son is left to prove the truth of his ring by performing the deeds that make one beloved to man and to God. Thus, in place of one true religion, certified by God, Lessing's great parable of religious toleration leaves us with the image of a diversity of religions, each attempting in their own fashion to make the world a better place.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How did Mendelssohn's understanding of toleration differ from that of others in the Berlin Enlightenment?
2. What use did Lessing make of incidents from Mendelssohn's life in writing *Nathan the Wise?*

Suggested Reading

Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Nathan the Wise*. Trans. Ronald Schechter. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

Other Readings of Interest

Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Theological Writings*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1956.

Mendelssohn, Moses. *Moses Mendelssohn: Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Sorkin, David. *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Lecture 13:
An Age of Revolutions

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read Dorinda Outram's *The Enlightenment,* pp. 114-127.

The relationship between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution has long been an object of controversy. It was an issue not only in France, where both supporters and opponents of the Revolution attempted to draw links between it and the philosophes, but also in the rest of Europe. In this lecture, we will look at some of these responses.

Did the Revolution Cause "the Enlightenment"?

The French historian Roger Chartier once suggested that perhaps we should reverse the classic question and consider whether it might make more sense to ask whether the French Revolution was responsible for "the Enlightenment." He had in mind the way in which the revolutionaries, seeking to legitimize the new government they were creating, selectively appealed to certain texts and certain authors, in the process creating a rather influential account of what "the Enlightenment" represented. But it was not simply defenders of the Revolution who drew such connections. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), the English writer and statesman Edmund Burke (1729-1797) portrayed the leaders of the Revolution as inexperienced "men of theory" whose obsession with creating a government that would conform to the demands of reason ultimately destroyed the traditional fabric that bound society together. More outlandish connections between the Enlightenment and the revolutionaries were drawn by such writers as the exiled French Jesuit Augustin Barruel (1741-1820), the Edinburgh philosopher John Robison (1735-1805), and the German Johann August Starck (1741-1816), all of whom concocted elaborate and influential theories linking the Bavarian Illuminati, the Masonic movement, and the philosophes into a common conspiracy aimed at overthrowing all the governments of Europe.

The Controversy in England

Among the most outspoken British supporters of the French Revolution was the dissenting clergyman Richard Price (1723-1791). For Price, as for his friend Joseph Priestly and their protégé Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), the revolutions in American and France marked the opening of a new era in which the rule of kings and priests will be replaced by the rule of law and reason.

Price was one of the principal objects of attack in Edmund Burke's polemic against the Revolution. At the heart of the dispute between the two men was a disagreement about how the political history of the last century was to be understood. For Price, the revolutions in France and America were the culmination of a process begun with the Glorious Revolution of 1688: all three revolutions rested on the principle that political authority derives from the consent of the governed. If a people find that their rulers have violated the trust

bestowed on them, they can be dismissed and replaced with other rulers. Burke rejected this interpretation and saw the Glorious Revolution not as a break in the monarchical line, but rather as an act of "conservation and correction" aimed at preserving the traditional order of succession. He argued that the American Revolution could be understood in much the same way: it was an effort to preserve traditional rights, rather than to inaugurate a new order. The French Revolution, however, marked for him something that was radically different: it was an attempt at completely remaking society and, as such, could only end in disaster.

What is ultimately at stake in the dispute between Burke and Price is a disagreement about the meaning of history—a question of how a people understands who they are, what they are doing, and where they are going. And this debate, as we shall see in the final lecture, would have a significant impact on how the legacy of the Enlightenment came to be understood.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What did Roger Chartier mean when he suggested that perhaps the French Revolution "invented" the Enlightenmment?
2. How did individuals like Price, Priestly, and Burke understand the relationship between enlightenment and the French Revolution?

Suggested Reading

Outram, Dorinda. *The Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 114-127.

Other Readings of Interest

Baker, Keith Michael. *Inventing the French Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Ed. J.G.A. Pocock. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

Hunt, Lynn, ed. *The French Revolution and Human Rights*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996, pp. 77-79.

Price, Richard. "Discourse on Love of Country." *Price: Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Lecture 14:
The Legacies of the Enlightenment

Before beginning this lecture you may want to . . .

Read James Schmidt's "Inventing the Enlightenment: British Hegelians, Anti-Jacobins, and the Oxford English Dictionary" in *Journal of the History of Ideas.*

The controversies discussed in the last lecture left their mark. For most of the nineteenth century, critics of the Enlightenment associated it with an over-evaluation of the power of reason, a contempt for tradition, and—to quote the *Oxford English Dictionary*—a "shallow and pretentious intellectualism." Voltaire, Diderot, and the other philosophes were viewed as creatures of a society that valued the witty repartee of the salon over the sobriety and profundity that, allegedly, were the hallmark of true philosophers.

The "Shallow Enlightenment"

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) played a major role in the framing of this indictment. Though he was once a close friend of Diderot and was an important enough contributor to the *Encyclopédie* to be ridiculed in Charles Pallisot's satirical play *The Philosophes* (1760), Rousseau came to be repelled by the world of the salons and, eventually, by Paris itself. He made his name throughout Europe with a series of works that, among other things, denounced what he saw as the hypocrisy and superficiality of modern society and the rampant inequality that reigned in pre-Revolutionary France.

Rousseau's criticisms would play an important role in the development of the Romantic movement and proved to be influential in shaping a view of the Enlightenment that saw it as a period that overestimated the power of human reason, reduced nature to an object to be manipulated, and was ignorant of the profound mysteries of tradition and religion.

Such charges stand in stark contrast to the emphasis that many Enlightenment thinkers placed on the limits of human reason. The Scottish Moralists, for example, were well aware that it is our sentiments that make us sociable creatures and that the most that reason can do is to cast some light on how they work. Likewise, the goal of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) was to demonstrate that ultimate questions involving God, the universe, and the origins of human freedom lay beyond the boundaries of human reason. Why, then, has the charge of "shallow and pretentious intellectualism" had such remarkable staying power?

"Reason, Tolerance, and Humanity"

An explanation for the unsavory reputation that the Enlightenment continues to have in some quarters can be traced to three factors. We can point, first of all, to the remarkable success of modern science in remaking the world. As we have seen, thinkers associated with the Enlightenment had an avid interest in the achievements of modern science and considerable hopes for the

benefits that scientific progress might bring to humanity. One famous testimony to this faith in science can be found in the *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795), written by Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794) while he was in hiding during the Terror. Condorcet had been a protégé of D'Alembert and was an active participant in the early years of the Revolution, where he emerged as a vigorous advocate of women's rights and an eloquent opponent of slavery. His opposition to the execution of the king (Condorcet was opposed, in principle, to capital punishment) led to his fall from public life. In his *Sketch,* he envisioned a world in which the methods of modern science would be brought to bear on all the problems of society, thus resulting in the triumph of "reason, tolerance, and humanity."

When the Enlightenment is criticized for its naïve faith in progress, Condorcet's *Sketch* is typically offered as evidence. Such criticisms may not be entirely wrong, which brings us to our second point: while we have seen, in the two centuries since Condorcet's death, scientific advances of a sort that even he could not have imagined, our political institutions and capacities for moral reasoning do not seem to have kept pace. Indeed, they may be increasingly incapable of dealing with the dilemmas that advancements in science have posed. The interest that Enlightenment thinkers had in science lay not simply in its promise of increasing human control over nature. Thinkers such as Kant also had hopes that the free and open criticism that serves as the ideal for scientific inquiry might be extended to a cosmopolitan community of readers and critics; this has the heart of his concept of "public reason," and it would seem to be an ideal that we are far from fulfilling.

But we should not underestimate the continued salience of the Enlightenment in one final area: religious toleration. Toleration was the great ideal of the Enlightenment and this ideal was nowhere more powerfully expressed than in the allegorical engraving of toleration that Daniel Nicolaus Chodwiecki (1726-1801) produced for a pocket calendar in 1792. It shows members of various religious faiths peacefully gathered together under the protection of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom. Where reason rules, the engraving would seem to suggest, toleration is possible. It is this ideal that lies at the heart of the Enlightenment and, as recent events have made all too clear, it is something that cannot be dismissed as "shallow and pretentious intellectualism."

"A Bright, Clear Mirror"

Perhaps no commentator on the Enlightenment was more aware of the continued importance of its legacy than the great German philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945). On the eve of Hitler's ascent to power, Cassirer's *Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932) was published in Germany. Cassirer had been an ardent defender of the Weimar Republic and a vigorous opponent of Hitler. With madness engulfing his country, the book's eloquent preface urged readers to apply the spirit of the Enlightenment, with its commitment to reason and critique, to the present and to measure the achievements of our own time against the "bright, clear mirror" of the Enlightenment.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why did the Enlightenment have such an unsavory reputation for much of the nineteenth century?
2. Were Enlightenment thinkers aware of possible limits to what reason could accomplish?

Suggested Reading

Schmidt, James. "Inventing the Enlightenment: British Hegelians, Anti-Jacobins, and the Oxford English Dictionary." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64:3, 2003, 421-443.

Other Readings of Interest

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