



1958

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Bloom, Robert L. et al. "4. The Ideals of the Enlightenment. Pt. X: The Eighteenth Century Enlightenment." Ideas and Institutions of Western Man (Gettysburg College, 1958), 67-87.

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4. The Ideals of the Enlightenment

Abstract

Among the ideals of the Enlightenment were nature, science, humanitarianism, cosmopolitanism, toleration, and progress. The ideals of any age are those ideas and principles to which men give their allegiance, and consequently ideals are a key to understanding what an age is like in terms of its hopes and aspirations, and to some extent its practices. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Enlightenment, Nature, Science, Humanitarianism, Cosmopolitanism, Toleration, Progress

Disciplines

History | Intellectual History

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This is a part of [Section X: The Eighteenth Century Enlightenment](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

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4. The Ideals of the Enlightenment

Among the ideals of the Enlightenment were nature, science, humanitarianism, cosmopolitanism, toleration, and progress. The ideals of any age are those ideas and principles to which men give their allegiance, and consequently ideals are a key to

* Reprinted from The Works of ... Joseph Butler ... (New York: Robert Carter, 1842), pp. 26-34, 36.

understanding what an age is like in terms of its hopes and aspirations, and to some extent its practices.

The preceding material has offered many reasons why nature and science were elevated to the position of ideals, so that here we shall merely emphasize some of those reasons. Nature and science were inextricably linked in the eighteenth century because they had one central meaning at that time: order. Science itself was an orderly inquiry. It was noted for discovering the harmony of the Newtonian world-machine. As we have seen, nature, symbolized by that machine, meant order, an order that extended from the physical laws of the universe to a moral law. The eighteenth century revered nature and science because it was keenly aware of the chaos that existed in human ideas and institutions; and because it was so desperately anxious to achieve reasonable, useful, and orderly ideas and institutions.

Science was not only a method of inquiry, but also a weapon, a political and social power that could be used to defeat religious superstition and bigotry, political tyranny, irrational customs, traditions, and laws. The Enlightenment was sure that these evils could be defeated with the help of science. Here again, nature was allied with science. The scientific investigator found what seemed rational and natural to him in every area of life from economics to metaphysics, and the rational and the natural were always what seemed desirable to the eighteenth century thinker. Science, allied with nature, was the means to the orderly life, the good life, heaven on earth.

To the Enlightenment humanitarianism was a shining new ideal without limits. It was an emphasis on the equal worth and dignity of every human being without regard to station, race, or civilization. This emphasis was based on the belief that all men have equal rights to happiness and liberty. The good society, then, is one in which each individual counts for one and in which happiness is to be measured by the standard of each individual. Humanitarianism also included an emotional feeling for humanity summed up in words like benevolence, sympathy, kindness, and fellow-feeling. The combination of principles and emotion resulted in the battle cry of humanité under which the eighteenth century hoped to carry the blessings of science to all mankind.

Cosmopolitanism followed logically from the belief in science and the order of nature as interpreted by the Enlightenment. Since science discovered facts and laws which were the same the world over, and since the order of nature was universal, it appeared that there was essentially only one truth, one society, one world. It appeared that, in fact, the cosmos was one city. More concretely, since the Enlightenment believed that human nature was the same the world over, it considered societies and countries as artificial groups, parts of one humanity whose peculiarities were unnatural. The man of the

Enlightenment was a citizen of the world, a brother to all those who served the ideals of science, nature, and humanity. Montesquieu (1689-1755), one of the philosophes, expressed this idea when he wrote:

If I knew of something that was useful to myself, but injurious to my family, I would cast it from my mind.
 If I knew of something which was useful to my family but injurious to my country, I would try to forget it.
 If I knew of something that was useful to my country, but injurious to Europe and the human race, I should regard it as a crime.

Thus the ideal of cosmopolitanism was closely linked to that of humanitarianism. The belief in one world society forced a concern for the welfare of all men, particularly for the races and societies that suffered from the policies of colonialism and slavery. Cosmopolitanism also implied pacifism. How can citizens of the one world fight with one another? Suggestions were made for a world government that would insure international peace and cooperation.

The final formulation of the principle of toleration as an ideal was due to the more fundamental belief in the right of free inquiry, in science as the road to truth. Toleration was simply the necessary condition for the pursuit of truth. It was because the Enlightenment believed so sincerely that science would shortly demonstrate the truth in every subject matter, and that men would embrace the truth once they knew it, that the philosophes demanded toleration for differences of opinion in the meantime. But this was not a conception of toleration as a means of promoting diversity of ideas and practices. Rather, it was a way of keeping authority, primarily that of church and state, from hindering man's search for truth, peace, and unity. Only by upholding toleration could the Enlightenment bring to an end the religious intolerance and political persecution which stood in the way of its progress toward unity and stability.

We have chosen several selections from Voltaire to illustrate the ideals of cosmopolitanism and toleration. The Essay on Toleration was written in 1763, and the two excerpts from the Philosophical Dictionary were published one year later. At this time Voltaire was in the midst of popularizing the case of Jean Calas (1698-1762), a Huguenot merchant of Toulouse. Calas had been charged with murder after his son was found hanged. He was accused of committing this deed because, it was said, the son wanted to become a Catholic. The father was found guilty, tortured, and executed. His property was confiscated. The widow appealed to Voltaire, and convinced him that her son had been, in fact, a suicide. He began a campaign on her behalf which lasted for three years and which resulted finally in the verdict's being reversed.

Shouldn't tolerate false teachings, or intolerance. Toleration to the enlightened.

Essay on Toleration *

Whether intolerance is
of natural and human law

Natural law is that indicated to men by nature. You have reared a child; he owes you respect as a father, gratitude as a benefactor. You have a right to the products of the soil that you have cultivated with your own hands. You have given or received a promise; it must be kept.

Human law must in every case be based on natural law. All over the earth the great principle of both is: Do not unto others what you would that they do not unto you. Now, in virtue of this principle, one man cannot say to another: "Believe what I believe, and what thou canst not believe, or thou shalt perish." Thus do men speak in Portugal, Spain, and Goa. In some other countries they are now content to say: "Believe, or I detest thee; believe, or I will do thee all the harm I can. Monster, thou sharest not my religion, and therefore hast no religion; thou shalt be a thing of horror to thy neighbours, thy city, and thy province."

If it were a point of human law to behave thus, the Japanese should detest the Chinese, who should abhor the Siamese; the Siamese, in turn, should persecute the Thibetans, who should fall upon the Hindoos. A Mogul should tear out the heart of the first Malabarian he met; the Malabarian should slay the Persian, who might massacre the Turk; and all of them should fling themselves against the Christians, who have so long devoured each other.

The supposed right of intolerance is absurd and barbaric. It is the right of the tiger; nay, it is far worse, for tigers do but tear in order to have food, while we rend each other for paragraphs.

Whether it is useful to
maintain the People in superstition

Such is the weakness, such the perversity, of the human race that it is better no doubt, for it to be subject to all conceivable superstitions, provided they be not murderous, than to live without religion. Man has always needed a curb; and, although it was ridiculous to sacrifice to fauns or naiads, it was much more reasonable and useful to worship these fantastic images of the deity than to sink into atheism. A violent atheist would be as great a plague as a violent superstitious man.

When men have not sound ideas of the divinity, false ideas will take their place; just as, in ages of impoverishment, when there is not sound money, people use bad coin. The pagan feared to commit a crime lest he should

* Voltaire, Toleration and Other Essays, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), pp. 30-31, 77-78, 80-81, 83-87. Used with permission.

Not complete toleration - don't tolerate atheist.

be punished by his false gods; the Asiatic fears the chastisement of his pagoda. Religion is necessary wherever there is a settled society. The laws take care of known crimes; religion watches secret crime.

But once men have come to embrace a pure and holy religion, superstition becomes, not merely useless, but dangerous. (We must not feed on acorns those to whom God offers bread.)

Superstition is to religion what astrology is to astronomy -- the mad daughter of a wise mother. These daughters have too long dominated the earth....

There remain, it is true, a few bigoted fanatics in the suburbs; but the disease, like vermin, attacks only the lowest of the populace. Every day reason penetrates farther into France, into the shops of merchants as well as the mansions of lords. We must cultivate the fruits of reason, the more willingly since it is now impossible to prevent them from developing. France, enlightened by Pascal, Nicole, Arnaud, Bossuet, Descartes, Gassendi, Bayle, Fountenelle, etc., cannot be ruled as it was ruled in earlier times.

If the masters of error -- the grand masters -- so long paid and honoured for brutalizing the human species ordered us to-day to believe that the seed must die in order to germinate; that the earth stands motionless on its foundations -- that it does not travel round the sun; that the tides are not a natural effect of gravitation; that the rainbow is not due to the refraction and reflection of light, etc., and based their decrees on ill-understood passages of Scripture, we know how they would be regarded by educated men. Would it be too much to call them fools? And if these masters employed force and persecution to secure the ascendancy of their insolent ignorance, would it be improper to speak of them as wild beasts?

The more the superstitions of the monks are despised, the more the bishops and priests are respected; while they do good the monkish superstitions from Rome do nothing but evil. And of all these superstitions, is not the most dangerous that of hating one's neighbour on account of his opinions? And is it not evident that it would be even more reasonable to worship the sacred navel, the sacred prepuce, and the milk and dress of the Virgin Mary, than to detest and persecute one's brother?

Of Universal Toleration

One does not need great art and skilful eloquence to prove that Christians ought to tolerate each other -- nay, even to regard all men as brothers. Why, you say, is the Turk, the Chinese, or the Jew my brother? Assuredly; are we not all children of the same father, creatures of the same God?

But these people despise us and treat us as idolaters. Very well; I will tell them that they are quite wrong.

It seems to me that I might astonish, at least the stubborn pride of a Mohammedan or a Buddhist priest if I spoke to them somewhat as follows:

This little globe, which is but a point, travels in space like many other globes; we are lost in the immensity. Man, about five feet high, is certainly a small thing in the universe. One of these imperceptible beings says to some of his neighbours, in Arabia or South Africa: "Listen to me, for the God of all these worlds has enlightened me. There are nine hundred million little ants like us on the earth, but my anthole alone is dear to God. All the others are eternally reprobated by him. Mine alone will be happy."

They would then interrupt me, and ask, who was the fool that talked all this nonsense. I should be obliged to tell them that it was themselves. I would then try to appease them, which would be difficult.

I would next address myself to the Christians, and would venture to say to, for instance, a Dominican friar -- an inquisitor of the faith: "Brother, you are aware that each province in Italy has its own dialect, and that people do not speak at Venice and Bergamo as they do at Florence. The Academy of La Crusca has fixed the language. Its dictionary is a rule that has to be followed, and the grammar of Matei is an infallible guide. But do you think that the consul of the Academy, or Matei in his absence, could in conscience cut out the tongues of all the Venetians and the Bergamese who persisted in speaking their own dialect?"

The inquisitor replies: "The two cases are very different. In our case it is a question of your eternal salvation. It is for your good that the heads of the inquisition direct that you shall be seized on the information of any one person, however infamous or criminal; that you shall have no advocate to defend you; that the name of your accuser shall not be made known to you; that the inquisitor shall promise you pardon and then condemn you; and that you shall then be subjected to five kinds of torture, and afterwards either flogged or sent to the galleys or ceremoniously burned. On this Father Ivonet, Doctor Chucalon, Zanchinus, Campegius, Royas, Telinus, Gomarus, Diabarus, and Gemelinus are explicit, and this pious practice admits of no exception."

I would take the liberty of replying: "Brother, possibly you are right. I am convinced that you wish to do me good. But could I not be saved without all that?"

It is true that these absurd horrors do not stain the face of the earth every day; but they have often done so, and the record of them would make up a volume much larger than the gospels which condemn them. Not only is it cruel to persecute, in this brief life, those who differ from us, but I am not sure if it is not too bold to declare that they are damned eternally. It seems to me that it is not the place of the atoms of a moment, such as we

are, thus to anticipate the decrees of the Creator. Far be it from me to question the principle, "Out of the Church there is no salvation." I respect it, and all that it reaches; but do we really know all the ways of God, and the full range of his mercies? May we not hope in him as much as fear him? Is it not enough to be loyal to the Church? Must each individual usurp the rights of the Deity, and decide, before he does, the eternal lot of all men?

When we wear mourning for a king of Sweden, Denmark, England, or Prussia, do we say that we wear mourning for one who burns eternally in hell? There are in Europe forty million people who are not of the Church of Rome. Shall we say to each of them: "Sir, seeing that you are infallibly damned, I will neither eat, nor deal nor speak with you?"

What ambassador of France, presented in audience to the Sultan, would say in the depths of his heart: "His Highness will undoubtedly burn for all eternity because he has been circumcised?" If he really believed that the Sultan is the mortal enemy of God, the object of his vengeance, could he speak to him? Ought he to be sent to him? With whom could we have intercourse? What duty of civil life could we ever fulfil if we were really convinced that we were dealing with damned souls?

Followers of a merciful God, if you were cruel of heart; if, in worshipping him whose whole law consisted in loving one's neighbour as oneself, you had burdened this pure and holy law with sophistry and unintelligible disputes; if you had lit the fires of discord for the sake of a new word or a single letter of the alphabet; if you had attached eternal torment to the omission of a few words or ceremonies that other people could not know, I should say to you: "Transport yourselves with me to the day on which all men will be judged, when God will deal with each according to his works. I see all the dead of former ages and of our own stand in his presence. Are you sure that our Creator and Father will say to the wise and virtuous Confucius, to the lawgiver Solon, to Pythagoras, to Zaleucus, to Socrates, to Plato, to the divine Antonines, to the good Trajan, to Titus, the delight of the human race, to Epictetus, and so many other model men: "Go, monsters, go and submit to the chastisement infinite in its intensity and duration; your torment shall be as eternal as I. And you, my beloved Jean Chatel, Ravailiac, Damiens, Cartouche, etc. [assassins in the cause of the Church], who have died with the prescribed formulae, come and share my empire and felicity for ever." You shrink with horror from such sentiments; and, now that they have escaped me, I have no more to say to you.

Natural Law *

B: What is natural law?

A: The instinct which makes us feel justice.

B: What do you call just and unjust?

A: What appears such to the entire universe.

B: The universe is composed of many heads. It is said that in Lacedaemon were applauded thefts for which people in Athens were condemned to the mines.

A: Abuse of words, logomachy, equivocation; theft could not be committed at Sparta, when everything was common property. What you call "theft" was the punishment for avarice.

B: It was forbidden to marry one's sister in Rome. It was allowed among the Egyptians, the Athenians and even among Jews, to marry one's sister on the father's side. It is but with regret that I cite that wretched little Jewish people, who should assuredly not serve as a rule for anyone, and who (putting religion aside) was never anything but a race of ignorant and fanatic brigands. But still, according to their books, the young Tamar, before being ravished by her brother Amnon, says to him: -- "Nay, my brother, do not thou this folly, but speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee." (2 Samuel xiii. 12, 13.)

A: Conventional law all that, arbitrary customs, fashions that pass: the essential remains always. Show me a country where it was honourable to rob me of the fruit of my toil, to break one's promise, to lie in order to hurt, to calumniate, to assassinate, to poison, to be ungrateful towards a benefactor, to beat one's father and one's mother when they offer you food.

B: Have you forgotten that Jean-Jacques, one of the fathers of the modern Church, has said that "the first man who dared enclose and cultivate a piece of land" was the enemy "of the human race," that he should have been exterminated, and that "the fruits of the earth are for all, and that the land belongs to none"? Have we not already examined together this lovely proposition which is so useful to society (Discourse on Inequality, second part)?

A: Who is this Jean-Jacques? he is certainly not either John the Baptist, nor John the Evangelist, nor James the Greater, nor James the Less; it must be some Hunnish wit who wrote that abominable impertinence or some poor joker bufo magro who wanted to laugh at what the entire world regards as most serious. For instead of going to spoil the land of a wise and industrious neighbour, he had only to imitate him; and every father of a family having followed this example, behold soon a very pretty village formed. The author of this passage seems

* This and the following article are reprinted from Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary (New York: Carlton House, n.d.), pp. 224-226, 267-270. Used with permission of Random House.

to me a very unsociable animal.

B: You think then that by outraging and robbing the good man who has surrounded his garden and chicken-run with a live hedge, he has been wanting in respect towards the duties of natural law?

A: Yes, yes, once again, there is a natural law, and it does not consist either in doing harm to others, or in rejoicing thereat.

B: I imagine that man likes and does harm only for his own advantage. But so many people are led to look for their own interest in the misfortune of others, vengeance is so violent a passion, there are such disastrous examples of it; ambition, still more fatal, has inundated the world with so much blood, that when I retrace for myself the horrible picture, I am tempted to avow that man is a very devil. In vain have I in my heart the notion of justice and injustice; an Attila courted by St. Leo, a Phocas flattered by St. Gregory with the most cowardly baseness, an Alexander VI sullied with so many incests, so many murders, so many poisonings, with whom the weak Louis XII, who is called "the good," makes the most infamous and intimate alliance; a Cromwell whose protection Cardinal Mazarin seeks, and for whom he drives out of France the heirs of Charles I, Louis XIV's first cousins, etc., etc.; a hundred like examples set my ideas in disorder, and I know no longer where I am.

A: Well, do storms stop our enjoyment of to-day's beautiful sun? Did the earthquake which destroyed half the city of Lisbon stop your making the voyage to Madrid very comfortably? If Attila was a brigand and Cardinal Mazarin a rogue, are there not princes and ministers who are honest people? Has it not been remarked that in the war of 1701, Louis XIV's council was composed of the most virtuous men? The Duc de Beauvilliers, the Marquis de Torci, the Maréchal de Villars, Chamillart lastly who passed for being incapable, but never for dishonest. Does not the idea of justice subsist always? It is upon that idea that all laws are founded. The Greeks called them "daughters of heaven" which only means daughters of nature. Have you no laws in your country?

B: Yes, some good, some bad.

A: Where, if it was not in the notions of natural law, did you get the idea that every man has within himself when his mind is properly made? You must have obtained it there, or nowhere.

B: You are right, there is a natural law; but it is still more natural to many people to forget it.

A: It is natural also to be one-eyed, hump-backed, lame, deformed, unhealthy; but one prefers people who are well made and healthy.

B: Why are there so many one-eyed and deformed minds?

A: Peace! But go to the article on "Power."

Sect

Every sect, in whatever sphere, is the rallying-point of doubt and error. Scotist, Thomist, Realist, Nominalist, Papist, Calvinist, Molinist, Jansenist, are only pseudonyms.

There are no sects in geometry; one does not speak of a Euclidian, an Archimedean.

When the truth is evident, it is impossible for parties and factions to arise. Never has there been a dispute as to whether there is daylight at noon.

The branch of astronomy which determines the course of the stars and the return of eclipses being once known, there is no more dispute among astronomers.

In England one does not say -- "I am a Newtonian, a Lockian, a Halleyan." Why? Those who have read cannot refuse their assent to the truths taught by these three great men. The more Newton is revered, the less do people style themselves Newtonians; this word supposes that there are anti-Newtonians in England. Maybe we still have a few Cartesians in France; that is solely because Descartes' system is a tissue of erroneous and ridiculous imaginings.

It is likewise with the small number of truths of fact which are well established. The records of the Tower of London having been authentically gathered by Rymer, there are no Rymerians, because it occurs to no one to combat this collection. In it one finds neither contradictions, absurdities nor prodigies; nothing which revolts the reason, nothing, consequently, which sectarians strive to maintain or upset by absurd arguments. Everyone agrees, therefore, that Rymer's records are worthy of belief.

You are Mohammedan, therefore there are people who are not, therefore you might well be wrong.

What would be the true religion if Christianity did not exist? the religion in which there were no sects; the religion in which all minds were necessarily in agreement.

Well, to what dogma do all minds agree? to the worship of a God and to integrity. All the philosophers of the world who have had a religion have said in all time -- "There is a God, and one must be just." There, then, is the universal religion established in all time and throughout mankind.

The point in which they all agree is therefore true, and the systems through which they differ are therefore false.

"My sect is the best," says a Brahmin to me. But, my friend, if your sect is good, it is necessary; for if it were not absolutely necessary you would admit to me that it was useless: if it is absolutely necessary, it is for all men; how then can it be that all men have not what is absolutely necessary to them? How is it possible for the rest of the world to laugh at you and your Brahma?

When Zarathustra, Hermes, Orpheus, Minos and all the great men say -- "Let us worship God, and let us be just," nobody laughs; but everyone hisses the man who claims that

one cannot please God unless when one dies one is holding a cow's tail, and the man who wants one to have the end of one's prepuce cut off, and the man who consecrates crocodiles and onions, and the man who attaches eternal salvation to the dead men's bones one carries under one's shirt, or to a plenary indulgence which one buys at Rome for two and a half sous.

Whence comes this universal competition in hisses and derision from one end of the world to the other? It is clear that the things at which everyone sneers are not of a very evident truth. What shall we say of one of Sejan's secretaries who dedicated to Petronius a bombastic book entitled -- "The Truths of the Sibylline Oracles, Proved by the Facts"?

This secretary proves to you first that it was necessary for God to send on earth several sibyls one after the other; for He had no other means of teaching mankind. It is demonstrated that God spoke to these sibyls, for the word sibyl signifies God's counsel. They had to live a long time, for it is the very least that persons to whom God speaks should have this privilege. They were twelve in number, for this number is sacred. They had certainly predicted all the events in the world, for Tarquinius Superbus bought three of their Books from an old woman for a hundred crowns. "What incredulous fellow," adds the secretary, "will dare deny all these evident facts which happened in a corner before the whole world? Who can deny the fulfilment of their prophecies? Has not Virgil himself quoted the predictions of the sibyls? If we have not the first examples of the Sibylline Books, written at a time when people did not know how to read or write, have we not authentic copies? Impiety must be silent before such proofs." Thus did Houttevillus speak to Sejan. He hoped to have a position as augur which would be worth an income of fifty thousand francs, and he had nothing.

"What my sect teaches is obscure, I admit it," says a fanatic; "and it is because of this obscurity that it must be believed; for the sect itself says it is full of obscurities. My sect is extravagant, therefore it is divine; for how should what appears so mad have been embraced by so many peoples, if it were not divine?" It is precisely like the Alcoran which the Sonnites say has an angel's face and an animal's snout; be not scandalized by the animal's snout, and worship the angel's face. Thus speaks this insensate fellow. But a fanatic of another sect answers -- "It is you who are the animal, and I who am the angel."

Well, who shall judge the suit? who shall decide between these two fanatics? The reasonable, impartial man learned in a knowledge that is not that of words; the man free from prejudice and lover of truth and justice; in short, the man who is not the foolish animal, and who does not think he is the angel.

Sect and error are synonymous. You are Peripatetic and I Platonician; we are therefore both wrong; for you combat Plato only because his fantasies have revolted you, and I am alienated from Aristotle only because it seems to me that he does not know what he is talking about. If one of the other had demonstrated the truth, there would be a sect no longer. To declare oneself for the opinion of the one or the other is to take sides in a civil war. There are no sects in mathematics, in experimental physics. A man who examines the relations between a cone and a sphere is not of the sect of Archimedes: he who sees that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the square of the two other sides is not of the sect of Pythagoras.

When you say that the blood circulates, that the air is heavy, that the sun's rays are pencils of seven refrangible rays, you are not either of the sect of Harvey, or the sect of Torricelli, or the sect of Newton; you agree merely with the truth demonstrated by them, and the entire universe will ever be of your opinion.

This is the character of truth; it is of all time; it is for all men; it has only to show itself to be recognized; one cannot argue against it. A long dispute signifies -- "Both parties are wrong."

The ideals of the Enlightenment were not only consistent with each other, but actually reinforced each other and emerged in their full significance in the ideal of progress. Nature, science, humanitarianism, cosmopolitanism, and toleration were means of attaining an improvement that ultimately would result in the perfect world, untorn by disharmonies. Locke's psychology with its stress on the omnipotence of the environment allowed the Enlightenment to believe that the new knowledge and a new environment would reform men and society. But why did the Enlightenment hope for, even believe in, perfectibility, in heaven on earth? Perhaps it was because it saw a new world, one that seemed for the first time to be flooded with light, a rational and controllable world. Perhaps it was because the Enlightenment contrasted this new universe with the old, which by comparison seemed to be one of darkness, irrationality, and evil.

Bernard Fontenelle (1657-1757) was one of the first men to formulate the idea of progress. Later thinkers, such as the philosophe, Turgot (1727-1781), developed more detailed theories which recognized some continuity in history and an appreciation of the development of civilization. But it was Condorcet who summarized the Enlightenment belief in progress and attempted to formulate its law.

Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794) rejected the army career which his parents had chosen for him to become a mathematician. In 1777 the French

Weltanschauung - world out-look.
Ancient Greeks - cyclical pathways change.
Humanists - up and down from golden age of Athens.
Enlighteners - no stopping of progress.

Hebrews - unfolding of divine plan.
progress
unfold
went

Academy of Sciences named him its perpetual secretary. By this time he had joined the ranks of the philosophes, written for the Encyclopédie, and was known as a sharp critic of the old regime in France. When the French Revolution broke out in 1789 Condorcet took a prominent place in its ranks. He quarreled with the more radical party which gained control of the Revolution in 1792, with the result that he was denounced and condemned to death. Fortunately, he had taken refuge in a private home and, while hiding there for nine months, he wrote The Progress of the Human Mind (1794), from which the following excerpt is taken. This work was therefore written without the assistance of books or other aids and certainly under strained conditions. In 1794 Condorcet attempted to escape from Paris, but was caught and imprisoned. The next morning he was found dead in his cell.

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It is possible to view the eighteenth century Enlightenment as the second major phase in the development of Western Civilization. More than any other period since the Middle Ages, it represented an attempt to synthesize the factors pertaining to man's existence into a complete world view. Neither the Renaissance with its interests focused on man, nor the Reformation with its interests on God and salvation, nor the science and philosophy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with their interests focused on nature, had made a sustained attempt to achieve such a synthesis.

Some have seen the Enlightenment as something essentially different from the medieval world, as the real beginning of the modern world. Such an interpretation stresses the fact that the Enlightenment was a revolution in beliefs and habits of thought. For the first time science broadly affected the thinking of educated men and was used in all inquiries. Man, earth, and the heavens were taken to be of the same stuff and governed by the same laws. This world was considered to be important and capable of improvement. Men expounded theories of economics, politics, and philosophy that justified the growing middle class. They scorned miracles, mystery, and authority. They believed that they had the truth about the universe and the solutions to human problems.

However, the Enlightenment has also been interpreted as essentially similar to the medieval world. This interpretation points out that in spite of a superficial modernity of ideas, it had a faith in an ordered and purposeful world that cannot be called modern. A well-known American historian, Carl L. Becker (1873-1945), persuasively developed this thesis in The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers, who he said had a faith that could not have been established by their reason or science, and to which they clung as blindly as the medieval theologians to theirs:

Alas yes, that is, indeed, the fact! The eighteenth-century Philosophers, like the medieval scholastics, held fast to a revealed body of knowledge, and they were

* Reprinted from Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), I, 1055-1061, 1067-1068. The Introduction is taken from the first edition of the same volume (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), I, 862-863. Used with permission.

unwilling or unable to learn anything from history which could not, by some ingenious trick played on the dead, be reconciled with their faith. Their faith, like the faith by which any age lives, was born of their experience and their needs; and since their experience and their needs were in deadly conflict with the traditional and established and still powerful philosophy of church and state, the articles of their faith were at every point opposed to those of the established philosophy.... With [their] creed the "constant and universal principles of human nature"...must be in accord, and "man in general" must be a creature who would conveniently illustrate these principles. What these "universal principles" were the Philosophers, therefore, understood before they went in search of them, and with "man in general" they were well acquainted, having created him in their own image. *

To Becker, then, the thought of the time had to conform to basic assumptions which an impartial analysis of man or history could not justify. The Enlightenment held to its assumptions and refused to accept what later generations believe to be the conclusions of reason and science. Becker concludes that since neither the religion of the Enlightenment nor the character that it gave man and the universe could be proven, the age itself was not modern.

This chapter itself is clearly an interpretation of the Enlightenment or an hypothesis about the nature of this period of history. One of the characteristics of this chapter that should be noted is that it is a highly abstract and simplified analysis of the Enlightenment. The division of the period into deism and materialism, the science of man, and the ideals of the Enlightenment is a method of analysis that inevitably leads the reader into a particular picture of the thought of the time. It is worth asking two pertinent and interesting questions which should always be asked of historical writing: Is this the true historical account of a period? Is this the best historical account for the purpose in mind?

* Carl L. Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), pp. 102-103. Used with permission.