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## XIII. Political Liberalism and Nationalism, 1815-1871

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## XIII. Political Liberalism and Nationalism, 1815-1871

### Abstract

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of two secular faiths which became key features of Western thought: political liberalism and nationalism. Their tenets were not widely known as early as the fourteenth century when medieval feudalism was giving way to the rising national state, Marsiglio of Padua (c. 1275 - c. 1343) had announced that political authority was properly lodged in the people. The seventeenth century had produced in John Locke (1632-1704) a man whose ideas on government later became a wellspring for political liberalism. The same era also found nationalism accentuated by colonial rivalries and mercantilist doctrines. Later, the Enlightenment left a legacy to both political liberalism and nationalism. The philosophers had reflected on ways and means of broadening the basis for government founded to preserve those inalienable rights based on natural law. In addition, their attacks on "Christian superstitions" undermined popular respect for religion, thereby opening the way for a new object of reverence. [excerpt]

### Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Political Liberalism, Nationalism, Western Thought, philosophy, French Revolution

### Disciplines

European Languages and Societies | History | Law | Philosophy | Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration | Religion

### Comments

This is a part of [Section XIII: Political Liberalism and Nationalism, 1815-1871](#). 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.

### Authors

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### XIII. POLITICAL LIBERALISM AND NATIONALISM, 1815-1871

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of two secular faiths which became key features of Western thought: political liberalism and nationalism. Their tenets were not wholly new. As early as the fourteenth century when medieval feudalism was giving way to the rising national state, Marsiglio of Padua (c. 1275 - c. 1343) had announced that political authority was properly lodged in the people. The seventeenth century had produced in John Locke (1632-1704) a man whose ideas on government later became a wellspring for political liberalism. The same era also found nationalism accentuated by colonial rivalries and mercantilist doctrines. Later, the Enlightenment left a legacy to both political liberalism and nationalism. The philosophes had reflected on ways and means of broadening the basis for government founded to preserve those inalienable rights based on natural law. In addition, their attacks on "Christian superstitions" undermined popular respect for religion, thereby opening the way for a new object of reverence.

Liberalism and nationalism gained popular acceptance in the intellectual upheaval that accompanied the French Revolution. The Rousseauist concept of the general will furnished a philosophic justification for government by the consent of the governed. And in the intense devotion to la patrie, an outgrowth of the Revolution, there was rooted much of the fervid patriotism that characterized the attitudes which came to dominate nineteenth century Europe. Although Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) distorted and transformed these idealistic notions into justification for the seizure of power throughout the Continent, they made an indelible impression on the European mind. Even if Bonapartism and all that it represented seemed ended by France's military defeat in 1815, it would have been strange indeed had Europe returned entirely to its old ways under the ancien régime. The vision of 1789 lingered on through succeeding decades, and contributed to the rise of liberal and nationalist thought in the Western World.