CHAPTER 24

ENLIGHTENMENT

Excerpted and adapted from J. Coffin et al., *Western Civilizations: Their History & Their Culture*, 17th edition, vol. 2 (New York, 2011) pp. 518-522 and 531-532.

The Enlightenment lasted for most of the eighteenth century, and Enlightenment writings shared several basic characteristics. They were marked, first, by a confidence in the powers of human reason unaided by divine grace or revelation. This naturalistic self-assurance stemmed, in part, from the remarkable accomplishments of the scientific revolution. Even when the details of Newton's physics were poorly understood, his methods provided a model for scientific inquiry into other phenomena. Nature operated according to laws that could be grasped by study, observation, and thought. The work of the extraordinary Scottish writer David Hume (d. 1776) provided the most direct bridge from the natural sciences to the Enlightenment. Newton had refused hypotheses or speculation about ultimate causes, preferring instead precise description of natural phenomena as the basis for discovering universal truths. Hume applied this same skeptical approach to the study of morality, the mind, economics, and government. Hume criticized the "passion for hypotheses and systems" that dominated much philosophical thinking. Experience and careful observation, he argued, usually did not support traditional assumptions about human nature and social realities. Hume insisted that these assumptions be reexamined and, when found lacking, rejected.

Embracing the use of unaided human reason to reexamine and potentially restructure the existing social order required confronting the power of Europe's traditional monarchies and religious institutions. "Dare to know!" the German philosopher Immanuel Kant challenged his contemporaries in his classic 1784 essay "What Is Enlightenment?" For Kant, the Enlightenment represented a declaration of intellectual independence. (He also called it an awakening and credited Hume with rousing him from his "dogmatic slumber.") Kant likened the intellectual history of humanity to the growth of a child. Enlightenment, in his view, was an escape from humanity's "self-imposed

immaturity" and a long overdue break with humanity's self-imposed parental figure, the Catholic Church. Coming of age meant the "determination and courage to think without the guidance of someone else," as an individual. According to Kant, full use of reason required autonomy and thus freedom from tradition and well-established authorities.

Despite their declarations of independence from the past, Enlightenment thinkers recognized a great debt to their immediate predecessors. Voltaire called Bacon, Newton, and Locke his "Holy Trinity." Indeed, much of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment consisted of translating, republishing, and thinking through the implications of the great works of the seventeenth century. Enlightenment thinkers drew heavily on Locke's studies of human knowledge, especially his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), which was even more influential than his political philosophy. Locke's theories of how humans acquire knowledge gave education and environment a critical role in shaping human character. All knowledge, he argued, originates from sense perception. The human mind at birth is a "blank tablet" (in Latin, *tabula rasa*). Only when an infant begins to experience things, to perceive the external world with its senses, does anything register in its mind. Locke's starting point, which became a central premise for those who followed, was the inherent goodness and perfectibility of humanity – he thus questioned the corrupting influence of original sin. According to Locke, a child could be perfected if the environment in which he was raised was perfectly structured by human reason. Unbound optimism and a belief in universal progress guided by human reason thus constituted a defining feature of Enlightenment thinking.

The most famous proponent of Enlightenment thought was Voltaire, born François Marie Arouet (1694-1778). Voltaire virtually personified the Enlightenment, commenting on an enormous range of subjects in a wide variety of literary forms. Educated by the Jesuits, he emerged quite young as a gifted and sharp-tongued writer. His gusto for provocation and criticism of the French monarchy landed him in the Bastille (a notorious prison in Paris) on charges of libel; soon afterward he was sent to England on temporary exile. In his three years there, Voltaire became an admirer of British political institutions, British culture, and British science; above all, he became an extremely persuasive

convert to the ideas of Locke, Bacon, and Newton. His single greatest accomplishment may have been popularizing Newton's work in France and more generally championing the cause of British empiricism and the inductive scientific method against the more deductive Cartesian French approach.

Voltaire's *Letters on the English Nation*, published after his return to France in 1734, made an immediate sensation. Voltaire's cause was religious and political liberty, and his weapons were comparisons. His admiration for British culture and politics became a stinging critique of French absolutism. He praised British open-mindedness and empiricism, the country's respect for scientists, and its support for research. He considered the relative weakness of the British aristocracy a sign of Britain's political health. Unlike the French, the British respected commerce and people who engage in it, Voltaire wrote. The British tax system was rational, free of the complicated exemptions for the privileged elite that were ruining French finances. The British House of Commons represented the middle classes and, in contrast with French absolutism, brought balance to British government and checked arbitrary power. In one of the book's more incendiary passages, Voltaire argued that in Britain, violent revolution had actually produced political moderation and stability: "The idol of arbitrary power was drowned in seas of blood … [and] the English nation is the only nation in the world that has succeeded in moderating the power of its kings by resisting them." Yet of all Britain's reputed virtues, religious toleration loomed largest of all. Britain, Voltaire argued, brought together citizens of different religions in a harmonious and productive culture. In this and other instances Voltaire oversimplified: British Catholics, Puritans, and Jews did not have equal civil rights. Yet the British policy of "toleration" did contrast with Louis XIV's hostile attitude toward Protestantism.

Voltaire outspokenly opposed religious intolerance and Catholic claims to possessing the sole, true religion. His most famous battle cry was "*Écrasez l'infâme* – Crush the infamous thing!" by which he meant all forms of repression, fanaticism, and religious dogmatism. He argued: "The less [religious] superstition, the less fanaticism; and the less fanaticism, the less misery." He did not oppose belief in God per se as the creator of the world; rather he sought to destroy religious dogma and ecclesiastical hierarchies. He insisted that religion

should be simple, basic, uncomplicated, devoid of mystery, tolerant of all. He viewed the Catholic Church, its traditions, and its dogmatic teachings as a great obstacle to the progress of the Enlightenment and to the unshackling of the human mind. Accordingly he fought and wrote against it with all his might.

Another leading figure in the Enlightenment, the Baron de Montesquieu (1689- 1755) was a very different kind of thinker than Voltaire. Montesquieu was born to a noble family. He inherited both an estate and, since state offices were property that passed from father to son, a position as magistrate in the Parlement, or law court, of Bordeaux. He was not a witty provocateur like Voltaire but a relatively cautious jurist, although he did write a satirical novel, *The Persian Letters* (1721), published anonymously (to protect his reputation) in Amsterdam as a young man. The novel was composed as letters from two Persian visitors to France. The visitors detailed the odd religious superstitions they witnessed, compared manners at the French court with those of the Turkish harems, and likened French absolutism to their own brands of eastern despotism. *The Persian Letters* was an immediate best-seller, inspiring many imitators to use the literary figure of a foreign observer to criticize contemporary French society.

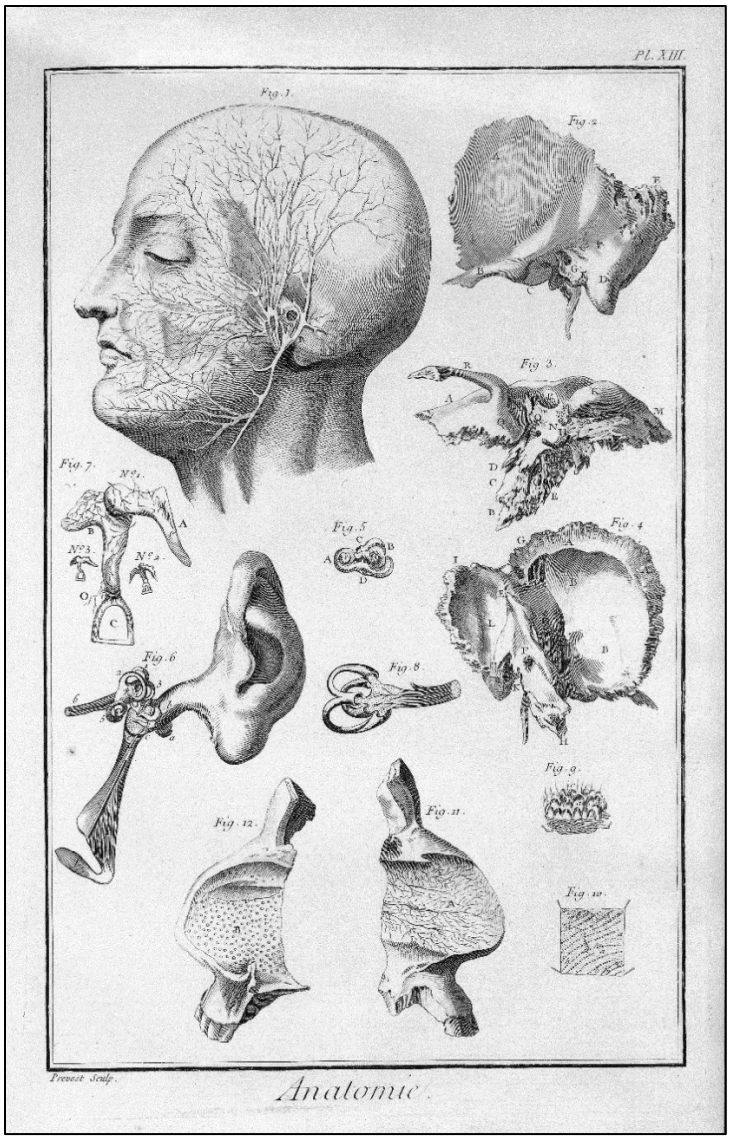
Montesquieu's serious treatise, *The Spirit of Laws* (1748), may have been the most influential work of the Enlightenment. Montesquieu investigated the structures that shaped law. First he examined historically how different environments, histories, and religious traditions had come together to create a great variety of governmental institutions. He then identified three major forms of government: republics, monarchies, and despotisms. A republic was government by many – either by an elite aristocracy or by the people as a whole. The soul of a republic was civic virtue, which allowed individual citizens to transcend their particular interests and strive for the common good. In a monarchy, on the other hand, one person ruled by law. The soul of a monarchy, wrote Montesquieu, was honor, which gave individuals an incentive to behave with loyalty toward their sovereign. The third form of government, despotism, was rule by a single person unchecked by law or by other powers. The soul of despotism was fear, since no citizen was secure and punishment took the place of education. Lest this seem abstract, Montesquieu devoted two chapters to the French monarchy, in which he spelled out what he saw as a dangerous drift

toward despotism in his own land. Like other Enlightenment thinkers, Montesquieu admired the British system and its separate and balanced powers – executive, legislative, and judicial – which guaranteed liberty in the sense of freedom from the absolute power of any single governing individual or group. His idealization of "checks and balances" had formative influence on Enlightenment political theorists and members of the governing elite, particularly those who wrote the United States Constitution in 1787.

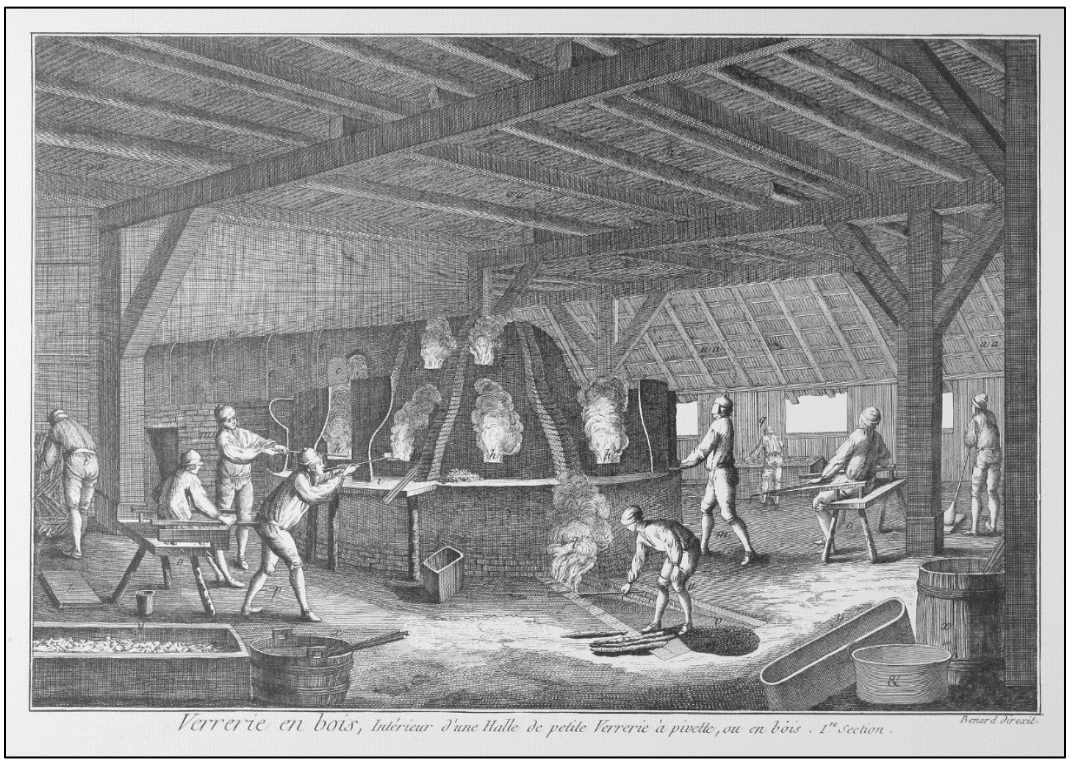
Voltaire's and Montesquieu's writings represent the themes and style of the French Enlightenment. But the most remarkable French publication of the century was a collective one: the *Encyclopedia*. The *Encyclopedia* claimed to summarize all the most advanced contemporary philosophical, scientific, and technical knowledge, making it available to any reader. In terms of sheer scope, this was the grandest statement of Enlightenment goals. It demonstrated how scientific analysis could be applied in nearly all realms of thought, and how these scientific findings can be transmitted conveniently to leaders of society. It aimed to reconsider an enormous range of traditions and institutions and put reason to the task of bringing natural happiness and progress to humanity. The guiding spirit behind the venture was Denis Diderot (d. 1784). Diderot was helped by the Newtonian mathematician Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (d. 1783) and by other leading men of letters, including Voltaire and Montesquieu. The *Encyclopedia* was published in installments between 1751 and 1772; by the time it was completed, it ran to seventeen large volumes of text and eleven more of illustrations, and contained over seventy-one thousand articles. A collaborative project, it helped create the image of Enlightenment thinkers working together for the progress of humanity.

Diderot commissioned articles on science and technology, showing how machines worked and illustrating new industrial processes. The point was to demonstrate how the everyday applications of science could promote social progress and alleviate human misery. Diderot turned the same methods to matters of politics and the foundations of the social order, including articles on economics, taxes, and the slave trade. Censorship made it difficult to write openly anti-religious articles. Diderot, therefore, thumbed his nose at religion in oblique ways; at the entry on the Eucharist, the reader found a terse (yet blasphemous) cross-reference: "See cannibalism." Gibes like this aroused storms

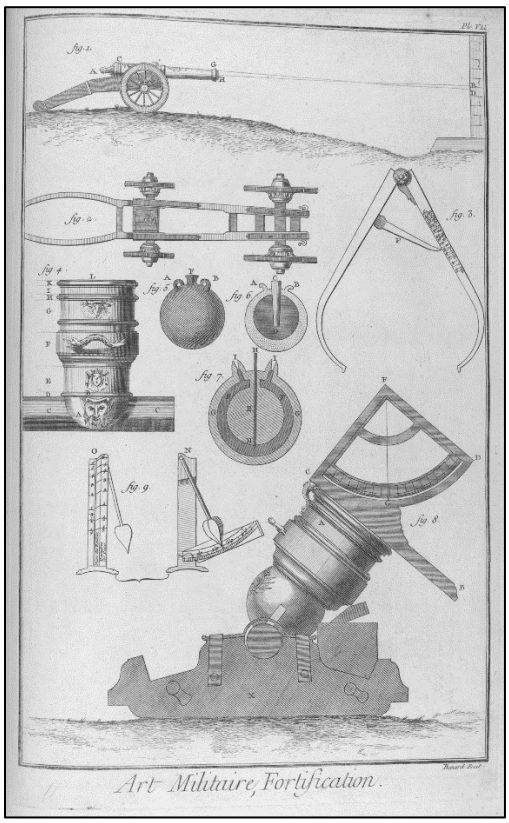
of controversy when the early volumes of the *Encyclopedia* appeared. The French government revoked the publishing permit for the *Encyclopedia*, declaring in 1759 that the encyclopedists were trying to "propagate materialism" (which meant atheism) "to destroy Religion, to inspire a spirit of independence, and to nourish the corruption of morals." The volumes sold remarkably well despite such bans and their hefty price. Purchasers belonged to the elite: aristocrats, government officials, prosperous merchants, and a scattering of members of the higher clergy. These purchasers, though, spanned Europe and its overseas colonies. The *Encyclopedia* thus disseminated Enlightenment ideals far and wide to a diverse and influential audience.



An illustration from Diderot's *Encyclopedia* depicting the various parts of the human ear.



Sketch of a glass-makers' workshop from Diderot's *Encyclopedia*



Implements of warfare used against defensive fortifications illustrated in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*

Less controversial than the writings of Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Diderot were those of the Scottish economist Adam Smith (d. 1790). Smith, in a treatise entitled *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), described what he believed was the science of economics. Like other natural sciences, economics abided by its own set of natural, universal laws which could be discovered by careful observation. Smith famously argued, for example, that as the supply of a commodity increased, its price invariably decreased so long as the demand for the product and its cost of production remained the same. Smith also encouraged the specialization of labor and international trade free of tariffs and restrictions – a "free market" founded on the specialized production of goods, he argued, would guarantee the lowest prices for the highest quality products. Smith also discussed the impact of the American colonies on the European market; he observed that European powers had increased their revenue by establishing strict trade monopolies within their colonial empires. Yet these monopolies, while immediately benefiting European manufacturers, were to the disadvantage of the colonists and could inspire discontent. As Smith in part predicted, the enforcement of a trade monopoly by Great Britain on its American holdings ultimately provoked revolution.

Another influential Enlightenment theorist, one who directly challenged the existing political order in France, was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (d. 1778). Rousseau presented his radical political beliefs in a treatise entitled *The Social Contract*, one which drew on the works of earlier theorists like Locke and Montesquieu but went far beyond their conclusions. Rousseau believed that legitimate authority arose from the people alone as their inherent natural right, a right which they could never alienate or surrender. His argument in *The Social Contract* has three parts. First, sovereignty belongs to the people alone; it should not be divided among different branches of government (as suggested Montesquieu), and it emphatically could not be entrusted to a king. In the late seventeenth century, Locke had spelled out the people's right to rebel against a tyrannical king. Rousseau argued instead that a king could never become sovereign to begin with since the people could not legitimately delegate their sovereignty to anyone else. Second, exercising sovereignty transforms and elevates the nation. Rousseau argued that when individual citizens form a "body politic," that body becomes more than just the sum of its parts. All

members are thenceforth bound by mutual obligation to seek the common good of one another. Third, the national community is united by what Rousseau enigmatically called the "general will." This term is notoriously difficult to understand. Rousseau proposed it as the single will of all the united members of the body politic, one which demands obedience from all members because it originates from all members and expresses the desires of all members collectively. All are bound by the social contract to obey the general will because it alone indicates the best path to the common good; in practice, this meant that majority opinion compelled the consent of any dissenters. Most importantly, Rousseau's radical chain of reasoning would soon be cited by the leaders of the French Revolution as justification for regicide and for political terror. The phrase "general will" would even be enshrined in the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*.

The Enlightenment, inspired in part by new developments in the natural sciences, thus started as a movement among European intellectuals who questioned the legitimacy of existing authoritative institutions, both religious and civil. Quickly this intellectual movement grew in popularity thanks to the writings of men like Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, and Rousseau. In the wake of this intellectual upheaval, new secret societies (most prominently Freemasonry) spread throughout Europe, seeking to undermine the leadership of traditional authority figures (such as popes, bishops, and kings). Ultimately, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, the Enlightenment principles of popular sovereignty, religious pluralism, and social progress served as the basis for rebellion and inspired the forging of a new, secular, democratic order both in the American colonies and in France.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

1.) How was the Enlightenment a product of the Scientific Revolution?

2.) Why did Enlightenment thinkers oppose traditional authority figures like kings and churchmen?

** PRIMARY SOURCE **

Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*

Excerpted from François-Marie Arouet, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*,
ed. N. Cronk (Oxford, 1994) pp. 61-64.

*** Francois-Marie Arouet (1694-1778) was the son of a Parisian notary and royal official at the Cour des Comptes and became one of the fathers of the Enlightenment in France. As a youngster, he attached himself to his godfather, the abbé de Chateauneuf, a freethinking priest who introduced him to progressive circles in the French capital. He attended the Jesuit College Louis-le-Grand, where he graduated in 1711 with a degree in philosophy. Though he enrolled in law school, he decided on a literary career and frequented the salons of Paris. His first success came in 1718 with the staging of Oedipus. At this point, he adopted the pen name of Voltaire. Legal difficulties that followed a brawl with the servants of the chevalier de Rohan resulted in Voltaire's exile to England. From 1726 to 1729 he was brought into personal contact with English philosophy, science, politics, and culture. Voltaire considered English thought and institutions the best in human history and devoted himself to their introduction to France on his return. His Letters Concerning the English Nation (1734) brought fame and notoriety. A warrant for his arrest forced him to flee once again. In fact, his career was marked by a series of legal difficulties and exiles: to Circey in Champagne in 1734, to Berlin and the court of Frederick II in 1750, to Geneva in 1752, and to Ferney in 1757. His lifelong commitments to the liberal ideals of freedom, toleration, reform, and empiricism made Voltaire one of the most remarkable figures of the Enlightenment. In the following letter, published in 1733, Voltaire even questions a truth so fundamental as the nature of the human soul. **

Letter 13 – On Mr. Locke

Perhaps no Man ever had a more judicious or more methodical Genius, or was a more acute Logician than Mr. Locke, and yet he was not deeply skill'd in the Mathematicks. This great Man could never subject himself to the tedious Fatigue of Calculations, nor to the dry Pursuit of Mathematical Truths, which do not at first present any sensible Objects to the Mind; and no one has given better

Proofs than he, that 'tis possible for a Man to have a geometrical Head without the Assistance of Geometry. Before his Time, several great Philosophers had declar'd, in the most positive Terms, what the Soul of Man is; but as these absolutely knew nothing about it, they might very well be allow'd to differ entirely in opinion from one another.

In Greece, the infant Seat of Arts and of Errors, and where the Grandeur as well as Folly of the human Mind went such prodigious Lengths, the People us'd to reason about the Soul in the very same Manner as we do. The divine Anaxagoras – in whose Honour an Altar was erected for his having taught Mankind that the Sun was greater than Peloponnesus, that Snow was black, and that the Heavens were of Stone – affirm'd that the Soul was an aerial Spirit, but at the same Time immortal. Diogenes (not he who was a cynical Philosopher after having coyn'd base Money) declar'd that the Soul was a Portion of the Substance of God; an Idea which we must confess was very sublime. Epicurus maintain'd that it was compos'd of Parts in the same Manner as the Body.

Aristotle, who has been explain'd a thousand Ways because he is unintelligible, was of the Opinion, according to some of his Disciples, that the Understanding in all Men is one and the same Substance. The divine Plato, Master of the divine Aristotle, and the divine Socrates, Master of the divine Plato, us'd to say that the Soul was corporeal and eternal. No doubt but the Demon of Socrates had instructed him in the Nature of it. Some People, indeed, pretend that a Man who boasted his being attended by a familiar Genius must infallibly be either a Knave or a Madman, but this kind of People are seldom satisfied with any Thing but Reason.

With regard to the Fathers of the Church, several in the primitive Ages believ'd that the Soul was human, and the Angels and God corporeal. Men naturally improve upon every System. St. Bernard, as Father Mabillon confesses, taught that the Soul after Death does not see God in the celestial Regions, but converses with Christ's human Nature only. However, he was not believ'd this Time on his bare Word; the Adventure of the Crusade having a little sunk the Credit of his Oracles. Afterwards a thousand Schoolmen arose, such as the irrefragable Doctor, the subtil Doctor, the angelic Doctor, the seraphic Doctor,

and the cherubic Doctor, who were all sure that they had a very clear and distinct Idea of the Soul, and yet wrote in such a Manner, that one would conclude they were resolv'd no one should understand a Word in their Writings. Our Des Cartes, born not to discover the Errors of Antiquity, but to substitute his own in the Room of them, and hurried away by that systematic Spirit which throws a Cloud over the Minds of the greatest Men, thought he had demonstrated that the Soul is the same Thing as Thought, in the same Manner as Matter (in his Opinion) is the same as Extension. He asserted that Man thinks eternally, and that the Soul, at its coming into the Body, is inform'd with the whole Series of metaphysical Notions; knowing God, infinite Space, possessing all abstract Ideas; in a Word, completely endued with the most sublime Lights, which it unhappily forgets at its issuing from the Womb. Father Malbranche, in his sublime Illusions, not only admitted innate Ideas, but did not doubt of our living wholly in God, and that God is, as it were, our Soul.

Such a Multitude of Reasoners having written the Romance of the Soul, a Sage at last arose, who gave, with an Air of the greatest Modesty, the History of it. Mr. Locke has display'd the human Soul, in the same Manner as an excellent Anatomist explains the Springs of the human Body. He everywhere takes the Light of Physicks for his Guide. He sometimes presumes to speak affirmatively, but then he presumes also to doubt. Instead of concluding at once what we know not, he examines gradually what we wou'd know. He takes an Infant at the Instant of his Birth; he traces, Step by Step, the Progress of his Understanding; examines what Things he has in common with Beasts, and what he possesses above them. Above all he consults himself; the being conscious that he himself thinks.

I shall leave, says he, to those who know more of this Matter than myself, the examining whether the Soul exists before or after the Organization of our Bodies. But I confess that 'tis my Lot to be animated with one of those heavy Souls which do not think always; and I am even so unhappy as not to conceive, that 'tis more necessary the Soul should think perpetually, than that Bodies shou'd be for ever in Motion.

With regard to my self, I shall boast that I have the Honour to be as stupid in this Particular as Mr. Locke. No one shall ever make me believe that I think always; and I am as little inclin'd as he cou'd be, to fancy that some Weeks after I was conceiv'd, I was a very learned Soul; knowing at that Time a thousand Things which I forgot at my Birth; and possessing when in the Womb, (tho' to no Manner of Purpose,) Knowledge which I lost the Instant I had occasion for it; and which I have never since been able to recover perfectly.

Mr. Locke after having destroy'd innate Ideas; after having fully renounc'd the Vanity of believing that we think always; after having laid down, from the most solid Principles, that Ideas enter the Mind through the Senses; having examin'd our simple and complex Ideas; having trac'd the human Mind through its several Operations; having shew'd that all the Languages in the World are imperfect, and the great Abuse that is made of Words every Moment; he at last comes to consider the Extent or rather the narrow Limits of human Knowledge. 'Twas in this Chapter he presum'd to advance, but very modestly, the following Words: "We shall, perhaps, never be capable of knowing, whether a Being, purely material, thinks or not." This sage Assertion was, by more Divines than one, look'd upon as a scandalous Declaration that the Soul is material and mortal. Some Englishmen, devout after their Way, sounded an Alarm. The Superstitious are the same in Society as Cowards in an Army; they themselves are seiz'd with a panic Fear, and communicate it to others. 'Twas loudly exclaim'd, that Mr. Locke intended to destroy Religion; nevertheless, Religion had nothing to do in the Affair, it being a Question purely Philosophical, altogether independent of Faith and Revelation.

Mr. Locke's Opponents needed but to examine, calmly and impartially, whether the declaring that Matter can think implies a Contradiction; and whether God is able to communicate Thought to Matter. But Divines are too apt to begin their Declarations with saying, that God is offended when People differ from them in Opinion; in which they too much resemble the bad Poets, who us'd to declare publickly that Boileau spake irreverently of Lewis the Fourteenth, because he ridicul'd their stupid Productions. Bishop Stillingfleet got the Reputation of a calm and unprejudic'd Divine, because he did not expressly make use of injurious Terms in his Dispute with Mr. Locke. That Divine entred

the Lists against him, but was defeated; for he argued as a Schoolman, and Locke as a Philosopher who was perfectly acquainted with the strong as well as the weak Side of the human Mind, and who fought with Weapons whose Temper he knew.

If I might presume to give my Opinion on so delicate a Subject after Mr. Locke, I would say, that Men have long disputed on the Nature and the Immortality of the Soul. With regard to its Immortality tis impossible to give a Demonstration of it, since its Nature is still the Subject of Controversy; which however must be thoroughly understood, before a Person can be able to determine whether it be immortal or not. Human Reason is so little able, merely by its own Strength, to demonstrate the Immortality of the Soul, that 'twas absolutely necessary Religion should reveal it to us. 'Tis of Advantage to Society in general, that Mankind should believe the Soul to be immortal; Faith commands us to do this; nothing more is requir'd, and the Matter is clear'd up at once. But 'tis otherwise with respect to its Nature; 'tis of little Importance to Religion, which only requires the Soul to be virtuous, what Substance it may be made of. 'Tis a Clock which is given us to regulate, but the Artist has not told us of what Materials the Spring of this Clock is compos'd.

I am a Body and, I think, that's all I know of the Matter. Shall I ascribe to an unknown Cause, what I can so easily impute to the only second Cause I am acquainted with? Here all the School Philosophers interrupt me with their Arguments, and declare that there is only Extension and Solidity in Bodies, and that there they can have nothing but Motion and Figure. Now Motion, Figure, Extension and Solidity cannot form a Thought, and consequently the Soul cannot be Matter. All this, so often repeated, mighty Series of Reasoning, amounts to no more than this: I am absolutely ignorant what Matter is; I guess, but imperfectly, some Properties of it; now, I absolutely cannot tell whether these Properties may be joyn'd to Thought. As I therefore know nothing, I maintain positively that Matter cannot think. In this Manner do the Schools reason.

Mr. Locke address'd these Gentlemen in the candid, sincere Manner following: At least confess your selves to be as ignorant as I. Neither your Imaginations nor mine are able to comprehend in what manner a Body is

susceptible of Ideas; and do you conceive better in what manner a Substance, of what kind soever, is susceptible of them? As you cannot comprehend either Matter or Spirit, why will you presume to assert any thing?

The superstitious Man comes afterwards, and declares, that all those must be burnt for the Good of their Souls, who so much as suspect that 'tis possible for the Body to think without any foreign Assistance. But what would these People say should they themselves be prov'd irreligious? And indeed, what Man can presume to assert, without being guilty at the same time of the greatest Impiety, that 'tis impossible for the Creator to form Matter with Thought and Sensation? Consider only, I beg you, what a Dilemma you bring yourselves into; you who confine in this Manner the Power of the Creator. Beasts have the same Organs, the same Sensations, the same Perceptions as we; they have Memory, and combine certain Ideas. In case it was not in the Power of God to animate Matter, and inform it with Sensation, the Consequence would be, either that Beasts are mere Machines, or that they have a spiritual Soul.

Methinks 'tis clearly evident that Beasts cannot be mere Machines, which I prove thus. God has given them the very same Organs of Sensation as to us: If therefore they have no Sensation, God has created a useless Thing; now according to your own Confession, God does nothing in vain; he therefore did not create so many Organs of Sensation, merely for them to be uninform'd with this Faculty; consequently Beasts are not mere Machines. Beasts, according to your Assertion, cannot be animated with a spiritual Soul; you will therefore, in spight of your self, be reduc'd to this only Assertion, viz. that God has endued the Organs of Beasts, who are mere Matter, with the Faculties of Sensation and Perception, which you call Instinct in them. But why may not God if he pleases, communicate to our more delicate Organs, that Faculty of feeling, perceiving, and thinking, which we call human Reason? To whatever Side you turn, you are forc'd to acknowledge your own Ignorance, and the boundless Power of the Creator. Exclaim therefore no more against the sage, the modest Philosophy of Mr. Locke, which so far from interfering with Religion, would be of use to demonstrate the Truth of it, in case Religion wanted any such Support. For what Philosophy can be of a more religious Nature than that which affirms nothing but what it conceives clearly; and conscious of its own Weakness, declares that we must always have recourse to God in our examining of the first Principles.

Besides, we must not be apprehensive that any philosophical Opinion will ever prejudice the Religion of a Country. Tho' our Demonstrations clash directly with our Mysteries, that's nothing to the Purpose, for the latter are not less rever'd upon that Account by our Christian Philosophers, who know very well that the Objects of Reason and those of Faith are of a very different Nature. Philosophers will never form a religious Sect, the Reason of which is, their Writings are not calculated for the Vulgar, and they themselves are free from Enthusiasm. If we divide Mankind into twenty Parts, 'twill be found that nineteen of these consist of Persons employ'd in manual Labour, who will never know that such a Man as Mr. Locke existed. In the remaining twentieth Part how few are Readers? And among such as are so, twenty amuse themselves with Romances to one who studies Philosophy. The thinking Part of Mankind are confin'd to a very small Number, and these will never disturb the Peace and Tranquillity of the World.

Neither Montagne, Locke, Bayle, Spinoza, Hobbes, the Lord Shaftsbury, Collins nor Toland lighted up the Firebrand of Discord in their Countries; this has generally been the Work of Divines, who being at first puff'd up with the Ambition of becoming Chiefs of a Sect, soon grew very desirous of being at the Head of a Party. But what do I say? All the Works of the modern Philosophers put together will never make so much Noise as even the Dispute which arose among the Franciscans, merely about the Fashion of their Sleeves and of their Cowls.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

1.) Why does Voltaire praise John Locke?

2.) What does Voltaire think we know about the human soul?