The Enlightenment

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The
Higher
Education
**Academy** **History**

Historical Insights: Focus on Teaching

The Enlightenment

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Contents

Introduction

If the Enlightenment has a motto, then it must surely be Immanuel Kant's imperative, 'Dare to know!' But what was it that Kant dared mankind to know? The answer, it appeared, was everything. As one of the greatest intellectual awakenings in Western history, the Enlightenment offered new perspectives upon such diverse topics as: political theory; economics; science and medicine; philosophy; education; literature; and history. It also sought to provide answers to questions about the development and progress of human nature. Indeed, it was hoped that all this accumulated knowledge, spread over a multitude of disciplines, would ultimately improve the lives of mankind and provide practical results that would serve in the general progress of humanity.
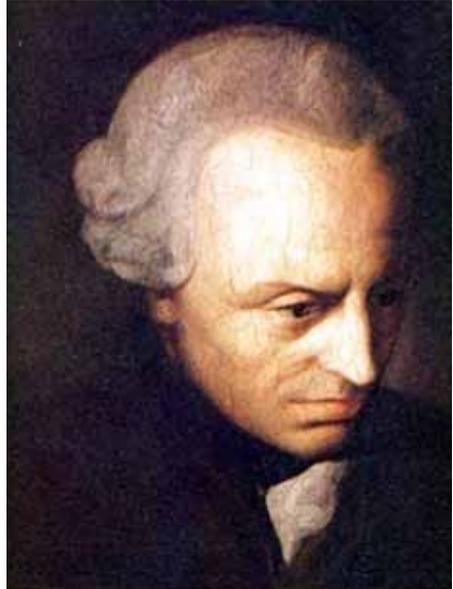
Immanuel Kant

This diversity, which gives the period such rich potential as a source of study, naturally creates problems for undergraduate courses on the Enlightenment. It is often difficult to accommodate such disparate topics, while attempting to present a coherent synthesis of ideas. Furthermore, disciplines which were once companions, such as moral philosophy and natural philosophy, have splintered into the physical sciences and philosophy which can often seem incompatible to the modern world view. Nevertheless, there is hope. For as more emphasis is placed on interdisciplinary approaches to teaching in universities, these seemingly fragmentary areas can be coherently joined. Kant also added that an individual should 'have the courage to use your own reason'. This is emblematic of the period as it has been frequently referred to as an 'Age of Reason'.

Nevertheless, modern scholarship has chipped away at this title, pointing to the fact that enlightened thinkers did not rely on *a priori* reason, but instead began to trust in experience and empirical testing. The form that reason took during the Enlightenment therefore requires clarification. In the 18th century, reason began to shift from the rationalism of Descartes and instead came to embrace empiricism. As such, it was naturally sceptical of abstract reasoning or any other forms which eschewed these fundamental principles.

David Hulme

Such was the critical apparatus of the Enlightenment that even reason itself endured a constant reassessment of its worth and application to the investigative drive of the age. Figures such as John Locke, David Hume, Thomas Reid, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and notably Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, consistently tested its boundaries. Nonetheless, reason remained a potent tool in the pursuit of knowledge and provided a basis for beginning to understand the underlying order of the universe.

Given the breadth and depth of the Enlightenment and its complex sprawl across many disparate disciplines (now separated with the development of the modern university system), it is difficult to provide a comprehensive course at undergraduate level which attempts to cover the diversity of the period. The first major problem for the Enlightenment historian is to establish dates for the beginning and end of the period. The most frequently cited start point is 1688, the year of the 'Glorious' Revolution in England and a year after Isaac Newton published his scientific masterwork the *Principia*. While this may be convenient from an English point of view, it is not satisfactory from a European perspective, especially as the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century (although even this term is a source of scholarly dispute) had laid the foundations for Newton in England and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in Germany to construct their natural philosophies.

At the other end of the scale, the beginning of the French Revolution is often viewed as the end of the Enlightenment but some scholars have argued that its demise can be given as late as 1815, when the defeat of Napoleon brought an end to the French revolutionary experiment. To further complicate matters, because the Enlightenment can lay claim to being the foundation of the modern world, it is also possible to argue that there is no death as such which can be attributed to it, only a metamorphosis into the world that we recognise today.

Another problem in dealing with the scope of the Enlightenment is the geographical extent to which it spread. While modern scholars acknowledge the undoubted international reach of the Enlightenment, it is not a unitary phenomenon. There are rich national and regional variations of enlightenment which all add unique flavours to

the mix. For example, while France is considered to be the centre of enlightenment, there are distinct branches in Scotland, England, the Germanic states, the Italian city states, Austria, Switzerland, Russia, Spain, Portugal and the North American colonies, to name but a few.

It must also be remembered that nation states themselves are somewhat anachronistic in this period and one must therefore be careful when identifying national currents in enlightenment thought. In certain quarters there has been an overemphasis on the impact of national enlightenments, which can distort and dilute the broader enlightenment experience.

The Scottish Enlightenment was identified in the 1960s as a unique expression of enlightened ideas and a movement which required a separate identity. However, the constant need to exert the distinctiveness of the Scottish version of enlightenment led to its partial divorce from its British and European context. This is most overtly realised in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, who envisaged a hierarchy of enlightenments which relegated France's position to most backward of the enlightened countries, and a country which looked too readily to the English model; a model itself overshadowed by Scottish achievements. Roy Porter, in *The Enlightenment in National Context* (1981), demonstrated the influence that one national form of enlightenment could have over another, citing the French *philosophes*' admiration for their English predecessors as an example. However, this view of the Enlightenment has led some Anglophone historians to elevate the significance of the British influence, while diminishing the role of its French counterpart. This is by no means exclusively an Anglophone phenomenon, but it is indicative of a number of historians who adopt insular and nationalistic approaches to the Enlightenment, without considering its wider European and indeed North American connections.

Within national boundaries themselves, there were great Enlightenment centres, mainly cities, providing major hubs around which intellectuals gathered. It was the *philosophes* in Paris, the *literati* in Edinburgh, the *Aufklärer* in the German states and the *illuministi* in the Italian lands that formed the core of this Enlightenment. Most recently, Charles Withers has demonstrated the importance of the 'geographical Enlightenment', arguing that any understanding we have for the exchange of ideas must possess a spatial quality. Instead of focusing on the meaning of the Enlightenment and its chronological development only, Withers instead analyses it geographically through inter-European networks, thus restoring the Enlightenment to its broader intellectual and social context.

What is enlightenment?

This fundamental question is a conundrum which has perplexed the minds of historians, just as much as it did the intellectuals of the period. Clarity was lacking for a long time on what the Enlightenment actually stood for, both intellectually and socially. It was not until Peter Gay published his work, *The Enlightenment: an interpretation* (1966–9), that a comprehensive study of the period was conducted in order to provide a survey of the chronological and geographical spread of the Enlightenment. However, Gay came to the conclusion that 'there was only one Enlightenment'. Although the study was extensive, Gay focused on the elites of the Enlightenment, which raised questions of how deeply it actually penetrated.

At the end of the 1960s, Franco Venturi asserted that the Enlightenment in Europe was necessarily split into two because of the two distinct political traditions dividing the continent. In the west, states dominated the political arena, while in central and eastern Europe multiethnic Empires existed. For Venturi, it was the presence of the *philosophes* (of their respective countries) which was conducive to societal development. However, this division was problematical as it was not applicable in England, where there was a distinct absence of such thinkers in the middle part of the 18th century, with the notable exception of Edward Gibbon.

J.G.A. Pocock has since managed to accommodate Gibbon by pluralising Enlightenments. In his extensive three-volume work, *Barbarism and Religion* (1999–2003), he locates Gibbon in an Arminian Enlightenment, a heretical movement stretching from Geneva to Oxford, which developed out of Calvinism. In doing so, Pocock has managed to find space for figures who do not fit neatly into national boxes, such as Gibbon, within enlightenment niches that extend beyond national and linguistic boundaries.

Debates have raged over the extent to which the Enlightenment was, at its core, a social or an intellectual phenomenon. However, given the expansive scope of the period, it would be wise to view the Enlightenment as an amalgamation of both these strands of discourse. Following on from Gay's work, Robert Darnton sought to reconcile the social and intellectual by synthesising them into a 'social history of ideas'. Unlike Gay, who had attempted to account for the macroscopic Enlightenment, Darnton deployed a micro-historical approach with direct reference to the French Revolution. In his book, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (1982), Darnton identified two Enlightenments, one 'high', and one 'low'. The high Enlightenment was the preserve of those who enjoyed patronage, access to learned academies, money and printing facilities, which men such as the encyclopedists enjoyed. The low Enlightenment was the domain of those who were denied admission to this upper sphere, and earned their livings as hacks, who were lucky if they were published at all.

Darnton warned against viewing the Enlightenment as a movement which took place among elites and instead encouraged his audience to 'question the overly highbrow, overly metaphysical view of intellectual life in the 18th century'.

In his ground-breaking work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1956; trans. 1989), Jürgen Habermas stipulated that, owing to historical circumstance, a new civic society had emerged in the 18th century. Powered by growing literacy rates in Europe and accessibility to literature, this was a space separated from the ruling authorities, where state power could be publicly monitored through public discourse and critical investigation. In Habermas's eyes, the coffee houses of England and the salons of France permitted opinion to be emancipated from the bonds of economic dependence.

Recent scholarship on the Enlightenment has begun to investigate more thoroughly the grass roots of the period, in order to assess the conditions upon which the elites of the Enlightenment could blossom. Such inquiry has both social and intellectual connotations, for it raises questions concerning the groups and networks of people at varying levels of society, whose own intellectual interests facilitated the appropriate conditions for the giants of the Enlightenment to publish their contributions. Equally, this points to the significance of a 'popular' enlightenment and the extent to which this was evident in Europe.

Given that the Enlightenment can be broken down into such disparate groupings, based on region, nationality, linguistic association and even religion, it is perhaps unwise to search for a unifying legacy which can be attributed to all those who took part in it. Although progress and improvement were central to the Enlightenment, the desire to illuminate the mind and encourage free intellectual enquiry inevitably led to diverse interpretations on the best way to pursue that progress.

The Enlightenment relationship with the church

Thanks to the significant strides that science had made in unravelling the mysteries of the cosmos, and providing a base for the explanation of celestial mechanics, the importance of God and religion in society began to be called into question. The same critical inquiry and recourse to reason was utilised in order to investigate religious doctrine and theological considerations. In addition to reason, the early proponents of biblical criticism employed comparative analysis and historical enquiry to access the veracity of the Bible and began to treat it as a historical source. Such ideas shook the churches to the core, for they questioned the religious claims for the foundation of morality and the very validity of the Bible as the revealed word of God. The questions which the enlightened thinkers raised formed a central plank in enlightenment discourse.

In France, the church was exposed to severe criticisms and subjected to strong anticlerical attacks. The *philosophes*, in particular, wished to secularise the church but, although they were a vocal group, they were, nevertheless, only representative of a small section of society. It is important to remember that, despite the extensive criticism and investigation to which religion was subjected, an examination of the relations between the church and the Enlightenment demonstrates that the period was not, in fact, dominated by atheism and scepticism.

In some instances, religion even went hand in hand with the Enlightenment. In Scotland, as Richard B. Sher has noted, the 'moderate literati', who formed the core society of enlightened Edinburgh, were predominantly Church of Scotland ministers. Despite the challenges that Christian churches had to face in the Enlightenment, they continued to thrive during the period and ultimately remained as important sources of power and influence.

Given the religious persecution that had taken place in Europe during the previous century, one of the most vociferous pleas in the Enlightenment was for religious toleration. John Locke in England was one of the first to begin a campaign for toleration and was later joined by Voltaire, Gotthold Lessing, Moses Mendelssohn and others. As toleration policies became more widespread in Europe as the century progressed, it was gradually introduced into state policy.

Women in the Enlightenment

The narrative of the Enlightenment can at times appear to be an overwhelmingly masculine affair. However, this view has been challenged in recent years thanks to the growth in Enlightenment gender studies. This new work does not merely incorporate women into historical discourse simply by accounting for the male Enlightenment authors' attitudes towards them. Instead, women have been established as active participants in the enlightenment process, and as figures who were capable of making their own intellectual contributions to the period. The salon in France provided an access point for women wishing to engage in the philosophical discussions of the age; however, there is still much debate over the extent to which they could make a proper contribution to such gatherings.

In England, the Coffee House provided a similar venue for enlightened discussion. Although this has usually been depicted as a male preserve, Helen Berry has recently demonstrated that women were present, to a certain degree, in such places and in some instances subverted the polite and refined roles that they were expected to fulfil. As the 18th century progressed, more and more women began to take part in debating societies. The difference with debating societies was that, despite initial

The Salon of Madame Geoffrin

opposition to their participation from some quarters, they actively encouraged women to engage in the process.

In her 2001 book, *The Other Enlightenment*, Carla Hesse also demonstrated that women were involved in the publication of their writings to a far greater level than had previously been thought.

Intellectual histories

It is of crucial importance when studying intellectual histories to remember that critical enquiry in the Enlightenment was not merely the preserve of scholars locked away in their ivory towers. Rather, there was an expansive level of free inquiry and exchange of ideas built upon a solid foundation of sociability. It was in this milieu that scientists, journalists, university professors, government officials, lawyers and, in some cases, clergymen could come together in places such as coffeehouses and salons to debate and refine their ideas. Indeed, the influence of a particular group in a particular country often varied across Europe. In England and France, for example, universities played relatively minor roles, whereas Scottish universities were major centres for enlightened discourse.

In his work, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (2006), Jonathan Israel has sought to re-establish intellectual history as the lens through which to focus on the Enlightenment. Israel contends that the latter's intellectual dimension is understood to a lesser degree than traditional social and cultural aspects. Nevertheless, he does not seek this reaffirmation of the intellectual at the expense of the social and cultural elements, and instead wishes to illustrate how ideas and social concerns interact.

A sharper focus on the application of intellectual history would help to provide a more informed understanding of the practical political material of the period. The most obvious examples are the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Both of these documents have naturally been studied in great detail on courses relating to the American and French Revolutions. However, the focus is usually on these works as turning points in the history of the nation.

From the perspective of intellectual history, it is possible to view these documents as the culmination of multiple enlightenment philosophies, enhanced by their own unique national character. Therefore, investigating the disparate philosophical impulses synthesised in these documents would provide students with the opportunity to gain a deeper appreciation of the practical impact of intellectual history in the Enlightenment and its aftermath. For instance, the Declaration of Independence draws strongly from the belief in the universal natural rights of mankind, makes use of the concept of the social contract and asserts a firm belief in the rights of citizens to remove an unjust government. Such ideas were to be found in the political works of John Locke, Thomas Paine, Joseph Priestly and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Despite the often competing philosophical influences on the Declaration, and the frequent recourse to European sources, the result was a document that metamorphosed the general concepts into a unique American context.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen also utilised existing theories on natural rights and freedom which the *philosophes* and the encyclopedists had championed. Significantly, it drew on the example of the American Declaration of Independence but again transformed its ideas to fit a specific French model.

Literature as a historical source

When people speak of literature today, it is generally understood to mean imaginative literature in prose and verse. During the Enlightenment, however, it covered a far broader spectrum, which incorporated histories, polemical pamphlets, periodicals, essays and tracts, as well as those works which constituted fiction. It is important to remember that during the early part of the Enlightenment, the novel format was itself in its infancy. The status of this type of literature was further undermined by

Title page of the first edition of Robinson Crusoe

the classical bias of early scholars, who viewed it as an inferior form of literature to the loftier pursuits of poetry. Indeed, many early works, of which Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is merely one example, initially presented themselves as histories to their readers, rather than declare themselves to be works of fiction. In subsequent years, novels were even referred to as 'fictitious histories'. However, with developments in aesthetic theory in the 1730s and 1740s, the novel began to emerge as a respectable and valued form of literature.

Employing literature as a historical source is beneficial in a number of ways. It can give us a better appreciation of the cultural trends of the Enlightenment by means of imitating particular styles of writing, while at once illuminating deeper concerns about contemporary attitudes and events. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) exploits the vogue for travel writing at the same time as providing, among other things, political commentary on Britain's relations with France and a critique on the power of reason. Montesquieu escaped the attention of the censors, in *The Persian Letters* (1721), by taking advantage of fictitious travel writing to provide a damning assessment of Parisian society through the eyes of two foreigners. Woven into the fabric of Voltaire's novel *Candide* (1759), is a comprehensive critical response to the

philosophy of Leibniz and Christian Wolff, particularly the Wolffian concept that the world in which we live is the best possible world. He also employs it as a platform to question basic assumptions about the importance of the enlightenment concept of progress and to examine the belief in the goodness of human nature.

James Macpherson's Ossianic poetry swept all of Europe and for a time satisfied the continent's desire to better understand the 'noble savage'. It was also a standard bearer for the enlightenment concept of the sublime, vividly realised in imaginative literature. Even though the poems were discovered to be forgeries, the entire episode raises important questions about the demand for such works in 18th-century society and opens up avenues for further sociological enquiry.

Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771) tapped directly into the 18th- century cult of sensibility, but it also examined the limits of that sensibility and the dangers evident in surrendering unthinkingly to it. In German speaking areas, the growth of literature, combined with the historical investigation into medieval literary works, resulted in a confident statement of the literary potential of the German language. This is most pronounced in sophisticated German works on theories of aesthetics and Johann von Goethe's creation of the *Bildungsroman* (novels concerning character formation).

A perfect example of how literature is a vital source for enriching our understanding of the Enlightenment can be found in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who made significant contributions to education, literature and political theory throughout his life and used his fiction both to entertain and to instruct. Rousseau's great educational novel, *Émile* (1762), was published in the same year as *The Social Contract* – each of these works casts light on the other. For example, both take as their central premise the general problem of the effects of civilisation on the natural state of mankind. *Émile* investigates this problem through the development of the individual, whereas *The Social Contract* approaches it from the broader perspective of the creation of society.
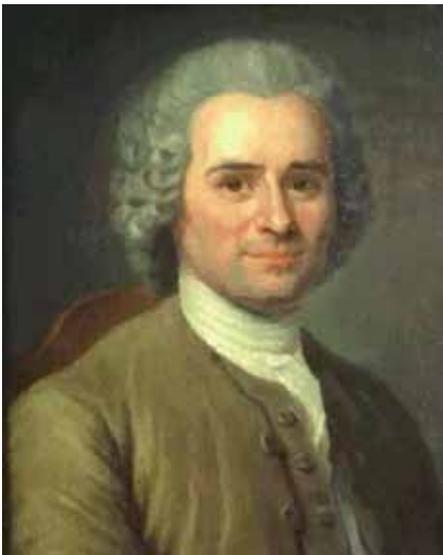
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

This interaction of imaginative and philosophical literatures is not an isolated case and can often yield unexpected, yet fruitful, opportunities for further investigation. The Scottish poet Robert Burns greatly admired Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), so much so that he adopted some of the ideas it contained before poetically recasting them in his verse. A prime example of this is Smith's 'impartial spectator', re-imagined in the poem 'To a Louse' through Burns's narrator, 'O wad some power the giftie gie us / To see oursels as ithers see us'.

All of these works demonstrate that literature has at the very least a dual role to play in historical investigation. Moreover, such literature can provide multiple points of contact between several disparate areas of enlightenment thought and, in this respect, are useful sources for those who wish to pursue an interdisciplinary approach to the age. Crucially, great advancements in printing technology during the Enlightenment meant that printed materials were disseminated far more extensively than had previously been possible.

This, added to rising literacy rates, resulted in literature being available to ever-increasing numbers of people, which is significant because it is often easy when teaching on the Enlightenment to focus exclusively on the elite individuals, whose literary endeavours provide the framework for most undergraduate courses. While these figures are certainly the guiding lights of the period, the growth of coffee houses, circulating libraries, the expansion of the periodical press, and cheaper production costs for printed materials created the conditions that allowed the Enlightenment to illuminate the lives of people at varying levels of society. In a practical sense, an increasingly informed populace made public opinion a more potent element in politics and, notably in the case of France and the American colonies, offered greater potential for political power.

The very examples of France and America do pose awkward questions about the practical success of enlightenment aims. Enlightened thinkers claimed that reason would emancipate mankind from their current chains. However, when state rulers applied reason to their administrations, it often served only to increase their own power and authority at the expense of the disadvantaged. For some scholars, the Terror of the French Revolution represented a failure of the *philosophes*, whose continued attacks on the church paved the way for the moral annihilation of the 1790s.

In Prussia, Frederick the Great, who had been revered as the perfect example of the philosopher king, exercised control over his people by instigating a system of

internal surveillance. Other proponents of enlightened despotism, Russia's Catherine the Great and Austria's Joseph II, may have encouraged programmes that improved their peoples and their land, but could still act with impunity in their own countries as there was no political machinery strong enough to oppose them. Even men such as Voltaire and Diderot, who in their youth saw some merit in this system, began to review their positions as the period progressed and started to call for some form of limited parliamentary monarchy.

Areas for teaching

The following is a short list of suggestions for potential teaching topics in Enlightenment studies. It is by no means exhaustive, but is designed to represent the many disparate areas which the Enlightenment covers. In doing so, I have attempted to account for: geographical considerations, in the form of the American and Scottish varieties of Enlightenment; gender divisions; philosophical considerations, such as the study of aesthetics; practical considerations, such as education and politics; and the debates over science and religion, which were integral to the period. Some examples of frequently asked questions and general points of interest have also been included, as has a short introductory bibliography to the subject areas.

BACKGROUND READING

R. Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge MA, 1982)

P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: an interpretation* (2 vols, New York, 1966–9)

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Eighteenth-century education in theory and practice

In the hands of the Enlightenment philosophers, education became of critical importance as a means of instilling reason into the minds of future generations. Building on John Locke's belief that the minds of children were blank slates upon which to inscribe ideals and values, childhood itself became an extended period of development, during which an individual passed through a distinct sequence of stages. In central Europe, a tradition of compulsory education had existed since the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Under Frederick the Great and Joseph II, edicts were issued requiring children in Prussia and Austria to attend primary schools,

in order to ensure that they were given a basic level of education. Although practical attempts were made to implement the educational theories of Enlightenment philosophers, it was the church which still retained control of the school system throughout most of Europe. In England, for example, all forms of education were subject to the Anglican Church, which forbade the teaching of non-Anglicans in its schools and universities. Although it was hoped that education would be universal, in the 18th century this excluded some people from educational access on religious grounds. It also excluded people because of their gender.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- How widespread was education in Europe and America in the 18th century?
- Did the disbanding of the Jesuits in 1773 create an educational vacuum in Europe?
- To what extent were enlightened theories on education practically implemented in both Europe and North America?
- How successful was Rousseau in creating an educational system which sought to accommodate natural qualities and civilised refinement?
- Did the compulsory educational system implemented in Prussia and Austria prove to be more successful than other systems of education in Europe?

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Politics and political theory in the 18th century

Early enlightened political theory was heavily influenced by men who had direct experience of persecution at the hands of 17th-century regimes. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke had left England to escape political persecution, while in the United Provinces, Hugo Grotius had spent time in prison on account of his religious and political beliefs. In order to prevent these conditions resulting in similar persecutions, the existing political structures would have to be altered to prevent history from repeating itself. Owing to the evidence of religious intolerance as a catalyst in the denigration of individuals, Enlightenment political theorists were eager to separate the roles of church and state in future political systems. While political theorists were formulating and refining their systems, there were an increasing number of calls for political reform. Many people were dissatisfied with the absolutism that existed in Europe, most notably in France under Louis XIV. In Prussia, under Frederick the Great, and Austria, under Joseph II, a type of enlightened despotism existed where rulers allowed a certain flourishing of enlightenment values, while still retaining absolute political control. However, as the age drew to a close, calls for separation of powers in order to prevent monarchical abuses, became more vociferous. In a practical sense, both the American and French Revolutions relied heavily on enlightened political theory to justify their actions.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- To what extent were the ideals of the Enlightenment accommodated by 'enlightened despotism'?
- How essential was the concept of Natural Law to political theorists of the Enlightenment?
- Why were 18th-century political theorists so keen to separate the church and state?
- How were 18th-century writings on political theory adopted and applied in the American and/or the French Revolutions?

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Religion in the Enlightenment

Thanks to the scientific efforts of men such as Copernicus, Galileo and Newton, new ideas about the order and operation of the universe began to take root during the 17th century. These developments were deeply troubling to conservatives in the Church, who had to confront uncomfortable questions about the role of God in this new universe. John Locke destabilised the role of religion still further when he postulated that moral behaviour might be more firmly rooted in natural processes than instilled by the laws of God. New studies in biblical criticism, originating in the Germanic states, analysed the Bible as a historical source, created by humans, and therefore subject to factual errors. Despite these challenges to the Church, the Enlightenment should not be characterised as an unrelenting assault upon it or, for that matter, as a continuous battle between reason and superstition. It is true that the French Enlightenment had a strong anti-clerical element. However, in places like Scotland the clergy played a crucial role in the enlightenment process, making frequent and important contributions in a variety of areas. Furthermore, questions over belief and non-belief were complicated by the existence of movements such as Deism – a belief system which accepted a divine creator, but a creator who set the universe in motion according to the laws of nature and then allowed it to develop naturally.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- How successful were the attempts to introduce religious toleration in the Enlightenment?
- Even though he was renowned for his anticlericalism, Voltaire noted the important part religion played in the stabilisation of society — to what extent did

religion maintain the social and political order during the 18th century?
- Were the ideas of science and religion in any way compatible in the Enlightenment?
- Were there distinct Protestant and Catholic versions of the Enlightenment?
- How big a threat was Deism to the religious establishment?

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Science in the Enlightenment

The 18th century was a time which saw a significant expansion of knowledge in the realm of the natural world. In conjunction with the emerging philosophical enquiry of the Enlightenment, men of science began to investigate widespread beliefs about the structure of the universe, and even the type of knowledge that was possible for the human mind to understand. A great many of the Enlightenment writers possessed a background in the sciences, or a willingness to conduct scientific experiments. However, science was not universally venerated by the *philosophes*. A notable opponent was Rousseau, who believed that science led to the distancing of mankind from nature and often worked against the improvement and development of individuals. The spread of science in the 18th century was enhanced by the numbers of scientific societies and academies which had started to emerge in the previous century and which, in general, accepted Newtonianism over the Cartesian system. Bodies, such as the French Academy of Sciences in France and the Royal Society in England, made major contributions to scientific advancement. It should be noted, however, that science was not a term often used by Enlightenment thinkers; instead, the more common rubric was natural philosophy. The use of natural philosophy illustrates that it was originally conceived of as a line of enquiry that shared contact points with moral philosophy and epistemology.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- How widespread was Newtonianism in Europe and North America during the 18th century?
- Were science and religion compatible in the 18th century?
- To what extent did the universities contribute to advancements in science and medicine during the Enlightenment?
- Was there a 'Scientific Revolution' in the Enlightenment?
- How close was the relationship between science and nature in the Age of Enlightenment?

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The Enlightenment in America

Although the Enlightenment originated in Europe, its influence spread to North America during the 18th century. Like its European counterpart, the American version was diverse and widespread, with the historian Henry F. May identifying four differing forms of enlightenment taking place on the continent. Men such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson epitomised the scientific investigations and the political theorising that marked the period. In certain respects the American Revolution was itself built upon the foundations of enlightened values, realised in the Declaration of Independence which drew heavily upon enlightened theories of the social contract.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- To what extent are the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights applications of Enlightenment theory?
- How important is deism in the lives of enlightened Americans?
- How much is the American Enlightenment a fusion of moderate and radical enlightenments?
- In what ways, and in what respects, did the American Enlightenment differ from its European counterpart?

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The philosophy of aesthetics

The study of aesthetics, a branch of philosophy which analyses beauty and its creation, was refined to such an extent during the Enlightenment that it became a separate discipline within the greater body of philosophy. The term itself was coined by the Prussian philosopher Alexander Baumgarten. Aesthetic theory in the Enlightenment was driven by the apparent conflict of feeling and reason, as well as the multitude of definitions ascribed to nature and the natural. However, studies of sense perception were not new in the Enlightenment, and by the 18th century there were already two systems of aesthetic enquiry, one descended from French rationalism and bound together with classicism, and another which relied on British empiricism. As aesthetic theory developed, philosophers such as Lord Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson identified the moral sense as a key proponent of aesthetic appreciation and their investigations influenced later writers such as David Hume. In the 1750s, thanks to the work of Edmund Burke, the sublime became a major component of

aesthetic understanding. As the century drew to a close, Immanuel Kant attempted to synthesise the disparate elements of aesthetics into one complete system which would help to underpin the foundation of human knowledge.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- How important is the 'moral sense' in providing a basis for aesthetic appreciation?
- In what ways do the aesthetic systems of France and Britain contrast with each other?
- Why was a logical understanding of the imagination so crucial to the German system of aesthetics?
- In what ways, and to what extent, do Enlightenment aestheticians agree, or disagree, over the issue of whether or not beauty and other aesthetic qualities have an objective existence outside human experience?
- Was Kant successful in creating a synthesis of preceding aesthetic theory?

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The Scottish Enlightenment

The Scottish Enlightenment differed from its continental counterpart, owing both to its lack of anticlericalism and to the strong representation of the Scottish universities. Instead, the Church was one of the driving forces in Scotland, thanks to the historical works of William Robertson, the literary criticism of Hugh Blair, and the sociological investigations of Adam Ferguson, who were all Church of Scotland ministers and possessors of university chairs. Not all the Scottish literati were ministers, however. David Hume and Adam Smith, who made the greatest contributions to Scottish Enlightenment thought in the fields of philosophy, history and economic theory, had more in common with the French *philosophes*. David Hume, despite his reputation for heresy, actually enjoyed cordial relations with the moderate literati of Scotland. Nevertheless, in an attempt to combat the sceptical philosophy of David Hume, Scottish philosophers, the most notable of whom was Thomas Reid, created the Common Sense school of philosophy. Indeed, this proved so successful that its ideas were exported to France and the newly created United States. Starting with the works of the Ulster-Scots professor, Francis Hutcheson, and continuing in the work of Hume and Lord Kames, the Scots developed sophisticated aesthetic theories that would go on to influence the German philosopher Kant.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- How important a factor was religion in the emergence and progress of the Scottish Enlightenment?
- David Hume called Scotland the 'historical nation'. What changes and innovations did Scots bring to the writing of history in the 18th century?
- In what ways did the Scottish Enlightenment engage with the wider European Enlightenment?
- To what extent did the Enlightenment experience differ in the Scottish towns of Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Glasgow?

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Women in the Enlightenment

As recent research has demonstrated, women were not merely passive objects in the Enlightenment but were, to an extent, active players who were capable of producing original thinking on a variety of subjects. The growth of *belles-lettres* in France gave women the opportunity to engage in literary debates and form societies where their voices could be heard. The salons of Paris not only admitted women, but were often presided over by wealthy, educated and powerful female figures. The Marquise de Lambert, for example, was one of the most prominent hostesses, who wrote and published works on the education of children and the status of women. And as a friend of Montesquieu she openly defended his *Persian Letters*, in addition to securing a place for him in the French Academy. In England, the abodes of women known as Bluestockings were frequently used to host the social and intellectual elites of the country. While Mary Wollstonecraft, in her political polemic, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), took some of the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment – equality, freedom and justice – arguing that they should be extended to everyone, regardless of their gender.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- To what extent did the salons of Europe provide women with the opportunities to actively participate in the Enlightenment?
- How important were clubs and societies in Europe and America in giving a voice to women?
- In what sense did women form part of the 'other Enlightenment', as identified by Carla Hesse?
- In what ways did the experience of women in the Enlightenment differ across Europe and America?

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