

Enlightenment

In Northern Europe, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw the first proliferation of the Enlightenment – a cultural movement characterized by its pleas in favor of toleration, its opposition to ‘prejudices’, its fascination with the results achieved by the Scientific Revolution as well as by its proposals for societal reforms. Philosophers played a crucial role in articulating its program. In this course we start close at home, for it was Pierre Bayle, *le philosophe de Rotterdam*, whose attacks on religious prejudices and whose demands for toleration would serve later generations of enlightened authors as a major source of inspiration. Next, we will turn to France and to Montesquieu and Voltaire in particular. In France a new cultural phenomenon emerges: the *philosophe*, witty, sociable, and fiercely critical of received tradition. Many French authors start reading British philosophers, and in this course we will deal with both Berkeley and Hume, and we will wrap up this overview of the early stages of the Enlightenment with a discussion of the Scottish Enlightenment, including Adam Smith. By 1750s the French Enlightenment in particular takes off its gloves. Diderot and D’Holbach start propagating a ‘Spinozist’ materialism, which raises the issue of the origins of the Radical Enlightenment. Simultaneously Rousseau singlehandedly revolutionizes French political thought. Meanwhile, the German Enlightenment (Thomasius, Wolff, Lessing) gets under way and the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility spreads throughout Europe. Special attention will be paid to the late eighteenth-century Copernican Revolution in philosophy launched by Immanuel Kant. Following the French Revolution, Burke and De Maistre launch their Counter-Enlightenment, the echoes of which can still be traced in twentieth-century critical accounts of the Enlightenment such as Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectics of Enlightenment*.

In the accompanying tutorials we will read one of Hume’s enduring masterpieces: *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* and Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*.