
UNIT 9 ENLIGHTENMENT*

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9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- learn about what is known as the Enlightenment, particularly in European context;
- explain about its predecessors;
- know about the various stages through which it evolved;
- chart out its important ideas; and
- learn about some of the important Enlightenment thinkers.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Enlightenment was one of the greatest intellectual movements in human history. Along with the Renaissance and the Reformation, it is considered to have provided the intellectual foundations of modernity. In fact, it is supposed to have contributed to the making of the modern world far more than any other movement that preceded it. It still is regarded as the epoch since when the modern world began, at least in terms of thought. It is generally considered that Enlightenment began in Western Europe from where it spread to other parts of Europe, then to North America and South America. Finally, during the nineteenth century, in the course of European incursions in all parts of the world, Enlightenment ideas made their mark throughout the world. In this Unit, we will discuss the Enlightenment only in its European context.

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9.2 THE MEANING OF ENLIGHTENMENT

To the question 'What is Enlightenment?' the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) responded: 'Dare to know! Have the courage to make use of your own understanding'. This response put emphasis on the individual, on critical thinking, and a rejection of the traditionally imposed way of thinking whether by religion or any other overarching authority. Kant's response was in keeping with the strong intellectual current during his time which stressed intellectual freedom and the use of Reason for seeking knowledge and progress. The Enlightenment thinkers, including Kant, wanted their ideas to reach to a wider audience which should consist of autonomous individuals with independent thinking. They, therefore, emphasized on wider education moving beyond the confines of formal schooling which, in many cases, was managed by religious institutions. In their opinion, a wider and broadly secular education would make the people capable of applying critical enquiry in their lives.

And yet the notion of the intellectual freedom was limited to educated and rational persons, mostly belonging to the upper and middle classes. The democratic reach of the Enlightenment did not encompass the masses, or even women. Many of the Enlightenment thinkers believed that it was dangerous for masses to take their own decisions. The same applied to most non-European peoples also. However, the Enlightenment thinkers thought that the masses, women, and the non-European people could benefit from the use of reason if they were properly guided.

Peter Gay, one of the important historians of Enlightenment, characterised it as the 'rise of modern paganism'. This was in view of the anti-Church pronouncements of many thinkers particularly during French Enlightenment. However, many historians have now contended that such a characterisation cannot be applied because Enlightenment cultures in most other countries, including Italy, Germany, Austria, Scotland, America and England, were not anti-Christianity. Even in France, only in limited cases could anti-Christian or anti-religious stance could be discerned. It is true that there was a general thrust against superstition and restrictive institutional forms of religion, and the wealth, power and corruption of the clergy was denounced. But the religion as such was not rejected, and there was a wide spectrum of attitudes towards religion. At the same time, there was a more general insistence on separating the civil from the sacred or the religion from the state. This attitude led in the direction of secularization of politics where institutional religions were supposed to play no role. Moreover, the material development was considered a more desirable goal and a better arena for human activity than search for the divine.

On the basis of the writings in recent decades, it is difficult to offer a precise definition of Enlightenment. The most we can attempt is to broadly describe it. On this ground, we can say that the Enlightenment was an intellectual movement in Europe during the eighteenth century. Its centre was France, but other European countries were also significantly involved in evolving their own versions of Enlightenment. The most common factor in all these different versions was the rejection of traditional and religious dogma with an appeal to reason and emphasis on the individual.

9.3 THE BACKGROUND

Enlightenment did not originate in intellectual vacuum. The development of modern science since the sixteenth century and of the modern philosophy during the seventeenth century had a lot of influence on the Enlightenment. The emphasis on observation, experimentation, analysis, and reasoning – which were at the root of the modern science – was picked up by Enlightenment thinkers in their fight against traditional and religious modes of thinking. Rene Descartes (rationalist philosophy), Isaac Newton (modern science), John Locke (liberal philosophy), and Pierre Bayle (scepticism) were among the most important influences. They were among the most important philosophers to have introduced the new scientific method in thinking about society. Some historians even consider Locke and Bayle as part of early Enlightenment.

Newton (1640-1726) had tried to combine the rationalist philosophy of Descartes with the experimental method of Francis Bacon. Voltaire, who was among the most important Enlightenment thinkers, particularly praised him for his scientific and philosophical achievements. Apart from his famous scientific discovering about gravitation and laws of motion, it was Newton's philosophical thesis about the nature of universe which most appealed to the Enlightenment thinkers. Newton visualized universe as a self-propelling machine which did not need God's intervention for its day-to-day functioning. It was originally set in motion by the God, who then withdrew and let the machine function on its own.

According to John Locke's (1632-1704), the 'scientific method' could be usefully employed for studying the society and humanity as much as it was applicable to the study of nature. He believed that at birth the mind of every human individual was a *tabula rasa* or blank slate on which it was possible to imprint any ideas. On empiricist lines, Locke believed that all knowledge derived from sensory perceptions and there were no inherited traits. This allowed for the possibility of posing an innate equality in society. He also rejected the crucial idea held by the Catholic Church that the humankind was burdened with the original sin. Locke advocated individual liberty, religious tolerance, separation of political powers, educational reforms and freedom of press.

Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) was a thorough-going sceptic who doubted almost all religions and moral philosophies that prevailed since ancient time. His ideas were quite suitable for Enlightenment which was grounded in doubt towards traditional authority, including that of Church. Since all systems could be doubted, Bayle advocated mutual tolerance, particularly in the field of religion.

Besides Scientific Revolution, the swift and momentous changes in the sphere of religion since the sixteenth century also created an atmosphere of opinion in which the established ideas were questioned, though still within religious garb. The proliferation of dissenting religious sects questioning and criticizing other religious ideas generated a spirit of enquiry. Scepticism emerged as a general spirit in the seventeenth century. Numerous sects and their distinctive ideologies and practices brought in the poor and labouring classes also within their ambits. Continued questioning and scepticism gave rise to a situation in which the role of organized religions in the lives of people increasingly became less. This laid the ground for the acceptance of non-Church and generally secular stance of the Enlightenment. People who were already losing interest in organized religions were receptive to the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers.

The foundations of the Enlightenment were laid not only in sphere of ideas but also in economic and social changes. The spread of print culture, creation of a new public sphere beyond the control of the Church and the government, and growth in the number of merchant and commercial classes and the bourgeoisie in general provided the basis for the spread of Enlightenment ideas. As institutions of social and intellectual interaction, salons and coffee houses provided active spaces. While the salons were operated mostly by upper-class ladies, the coffee houses were truly public institutions. Since the late seventeenth century, the coffee houses grew significantly in many European cities. As an institution of public interaction, coffee houses were less high-brow than salons and less mass-oriented than the taverns. They emerged and spread as truly middle-class institutions providing spaces for polite and orderly socializing and intellectual discussion. They acted as bases for creation and dissemination of ideas which were crucial for Enlightenment culture.

One of the most important phenomena which shaped the contours of Enlightenment was the colonization of non-European countries by the Europeans. The load of knowledge gathered from the colonial countries weighed quite heavily on Enlightenment thought. Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Raynal, Robertson and many other Enlightenment thinkers derived heavily from colonial sources to build their theories or develop their critique. Rousseau also famously modelled his image of the 'noble savage' on the native American version. India and China played important role in Voltaire's critique of pre-modern European states and religions. Received colonial knowledge of Asia served Montesquieu greatly in developing his theories on the determining role of climate and geography. Robertson relied heavily on non-European knowledge to develop his idea of stage-wise development of human society.

9.4 STAGES

Although the Enlightenment was initially anchored in France, particularly in Paris, it quickly spread across much of Europe, including the German states, the Dutch Republic, Britain, Italy, and North America. The Enlightenment ideas also reached to Eastern Europe, particularly Russia and Poland, and to the Balkan countries. The reception of French ideas took different forms in different countries. For example, in Italy it provided opportunities for the anti-Church thinkers to attack clerical and papal intervention in politics, while in Britain it gave rise to a distinctive form of 'Scottish Enlightenment'.

The initial sources of diffusion of Enlightenment ideas were the Parisian salons and coffee houses. These became the hotbeds of ideas and opinions about society, politics, government, education, and nature. It was here that most French intellectuals and many intellectuals from other European countries gathered to informally discuss and deliberate their ideas. And it was from here that these ideas were carried to other parts of France and to other European countries, even to America. The wide spread of Enlightenment ideas, though mostly within Europe, resulted in the creation of a trans-border community referred to as the 'republic of letters'. It was an informal international community of public intellectuals engaged in spread of new knowledge and the new ways of thinking.

There were three main stages through which the Enlightenment evolved, particularly in Western Europe. The first phase may be said to be during the first

half of the eighteenth century, and this phase was directly influenced by the ideas of the preceding modern scientific advancement, also known as the ‘Scientific Revolution’ which introduced radical changes in the intellectual atmosphere of Western Europe. It was natural that the emerging Enlightenment would derive many of its early ideas from this momentous intellectual change.

The second phase, known as high Enlightenment, began with the important works of some most famous Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu and Voltaire. Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of Laws* (1748) may be said to have heralded this new phase which can be said to end by 1778 when the three great French thinkers of the period – Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau – were dead.

The third phase, also called late Enlightenment, marked ‘a shift from an emphasis on human reason to a greater preoccupation with the emotions and passions of mankind’ [Merriman, 2010: 313]. In this period, there were several monarchs who adopted certain ideas of Enlightenment and applied them in their respective domains. This period also witnessed a wider dissemination of these ideas among common people resulting in undermining of the higher authority, particularly in France. This process ultimately led to the growth of revolutionary ideas in France and elsewhere. One of the distinctive features of this phase was a shift from emphasis on reason to one on emotions, as earlier exemplified in Rousseau. Another important trend was the emphasis on the idea of freedom on the working of the economies as advocated by Adam Smith. The shift from mercantilism (with emphasis on gold and silver and protectionist economic policies) to economic liberalism (advocating free international trade) occurred in this period. During this stage, there was also emphasis on the distinctive national cultures and national identities. This phase also witnessed the increasing involvement of the common people in the adaptation of the Enlightenment ideas with new meanings, particularly radical anti-establishment stance.

Another important development of the late Enlightenment was the growth of German idealist philosophy, beginning with Kant, which stipulated that reason and sensory perceptions were not the only source of our knowledge of the world. Instead, it laid emphasis on the primacy of ideas as the basis of knowledge. The world could only be understood through the medium of concept generated from each person’s own experiences. This led away from the High Enlightenment’s belief in universality of ideas and a rational objectivity overriding individual experiences and beliefs.

9.5 MAIN IDEAS OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The ideas of Enlightenment proved to be so potent and so applicable to the emerging modern world that Enlightenment became one of the greatest intellectual milestones in the history of humanity. The modern world became so closely identified with Enlightenment that it is also referred to as post-Enlightenment world in intellectual terms. These ideas encompassed long-ranging views on nature, human world, society, economy, state, international relations, and human freedom.

In the Western world, the Enlightenment thinkers questioned the centuries-old thinking generated and rooted by Christianity and other traditional forms of thought. Thus, the *philosophes* (as the French Enlightenment thinkers were also

called) pushed for secularization at all levels of politics and society and challenged the established authority of the Churches. They emphasized on individual thinking on rational lines and questioned the traditional ideas and practices passed on from generation to generation without any thinking. At another level, they attacked the institution of slavery widely established by the Europeans in the Americas and elsewhere.

However, although very critical of organized religions, particularly Catholicism, the Enlightenment thinkers were not anti-religion. Excepting a few, such as d'Holbach (1723-1789) and Claude Helvetius (1715-1771), most Enlightenment thinkers believed in the existence of God. However, their God was reasonable and non-interfering. Many of the Enlightenment thinkers believed in deism which meant that the creator of the universe was God but who did not interfere in the working of universe or human society. Deism combined reason and belief in a happy mixture. It was possible for the deists to analyse the nature and human society in rational and scientific terms while at the same time keeping their faith in the original Creator (God) intact.

Scepticism towards, even rejection of, the traditional authority was the hallmark of Enlightenment. Universal reason, which was regarded as the way to understand the world, was supposed to be applied by each individual. It was the belief that all human beings were innately good and reasonable. It was possible to fully comprehend the world if proper scientific analysis was applied. There could be continuous development and progress if suitable use was made of reason and science.

Some of the Enlightenment thinkers also emphasized the popular sovereignty and the rule of law. Although many philosophers were patronized by kings and nobles, and they did not reject the institution of monarchy, they were against assumption of unbridled powers in the hands of the rulers, whether monarchs or otherwise.

In its overall thrust, Enlightenment was anti-imperialist and many of the thinkers strongly condemned the colonial rule of violence and exploitation. Some of them, such as Diderot, Raynal, Herder, and Condorcet very strongly denounced the European greed, arrogance, violence and rapacious behaviour in colonial territories.

The Enlightenment thinkers were against the arbitrary nature of authority of their times and advocated rule of law and emphasized on cultivating virtues among the rulers. However, they believed in popular sovereignty but not in democracy or power to people. For them, freedom consisted in 'obedience only to the legal actions of legally constituted authorities' [Black, 1990: 214]. Equality was qualified as equality before law not in social or economic terms. They considered property as individual right, and the division of society into various orders was regarded as natural.

The primacy of reason, rejection of dogmatic thinking, emphasis on individual thinking, idea of progress, superiority of the modern world as against the pre-modern one, the belief that the human nature was the same everywhere and consequent universalism were the most important ideas of Enlightenment.

Although the Enlightenment thinkers propagated powerful anti-establishment ideas, it was mostly done at the intellectual level. They were not activists and

practical revolutionaries, and they did not lead revolts. They relied on pen, papers, and prints to disseminate their ideas. Their mediums of communication were 'letters, unpublished manuscripts, books, pamphlets, brochures, and ... novels, poetry, drama, literary and art criticism, and political philosophy' [Merriman, 2010: 316].

Despite certain broad, common stand in favour of rational and secular thought, the Enlightenment thinkers differed from each other in quite significant ways. Thus, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau were deists who believed that the God existed as the prime mover of the natural machine. After setting into motion the huge machine of nature and its basic laws, however, the God withdrew and did not interfere in the everyday life of humanity. Thus, after initiating the laws of nature and human world, the God left the humans alone to work out their actions and routes of progress. On the other hand, Diderot, Holbach and Helvetius were atheists. Even during what has been categorized as 'late Enlightenment' we find a variety of responses from intellectuals generally associated with Enlightenment. Thus, while Condorcet took a radical stand on religion and political authority, Kant was rather conciliatory to these. Even the ideas and the terms used by different thinkers in different national contexts carried different meanings. Similarly, the ideas related to the Enlightenment varied in different countries and what was originally pronounced in France would not remain the same in Italy or Poland. At another level, while many Enlightenment thinkers believed in linear and continuous progress, some like David Hume supported a cyclical view of history. Rousseau thought that human society had declined in many ways rather than progressing.

However, belief in reason and critical enquiry were generally common among all the Enlightenment thinkers. The reason served as both the goal and the method of enquiry. It was believed that the reason helped in human progress by making the humans overcome their environment and the human society to dominate the nature. Reason also promoted scepticism towards any given norms and settled authority and emphasized reliance of objectivity and proper scientific analysis. The reason acted against the established authorities of the Church and the state and helped to provide a radical edge to Enlightenment. At the same time, however, it also served to demarcate a sharp distinction between the humans and animals, and to help create a regime of marginalization for those humans who were regarded as insane, mad, or lacking in the faculty to reason. Moreover, it also marked a distinction between the people and countries possessing higher rational faculties, such as the Europeans, and those with lower rationality such as the people in the colonies, the blacks, the savages, the wild people, and the slaves. Distinctions were also made between modern European people with a developed rationality and hence social and political organization, and the pre-modern people of all sorts.

In recent decades, questions have been raised about any linear development and uniform character of Enlightenment ideology. It has been argued that although Enlightenment thinkers apparently blasted against religion, it is possible to locate that their attack was mostly against the established religion, particularly Catholic Church and the priests, rather than against religion as such. There were in fact very few direct attack against Christianity. In some cases, the reason was supposed to reinforce the values and beliefs of Christianity. Reason was sometimes used even to support divine revelation and miracles. Many intellectuals of this period

‘shared Locke’s view that a rational appreciation of man’s situation would lead people to be Christians’ [Black, 1990: 210]. Still, while most of them were not anti-religious, or even anti-Christian, they were also not concerned about matters of soul. Their concerns were definitely worldly and secular.

None of the major Enlightenment thinkers, even in France where they developed a strong critique of establishment, faced any prolonged and severe penal action. Despite their many anti-establishment views, the Enlightenment thinkers were not averse to the idea of accepting favours from the contemporary monarchical rulers. Thus, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Diderot accepted membership of the French Royal Academy. They all praised the ‘enlightened’ monarch Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine of Russia. Many of the famous philosophers also earned a lot of money, besides gaining prestige. Most of them lived long life in moderate affluence. They were appreciated and even lionised in many cases. They enjoyed glory within their lifetime and they tried to convince many autocratic rulers of their times to implement their ideas on government. Despite the critical stance, most of them were reformers and not revolutionaries. Their criticism of monarchy was rather limited, and even their radical critique of the Catholic Church evoked less animosity and incurred less risk in France than it would have done in a rigidly orthodox century like Spain. On the other hand, their deism and anti-Church stance which appeared very radical in France would not have acquired similar edge in England or Holland.

Scottish Enlightenment and New Economic Thought

The term ‘Scottish Enlightenment’ is used for a number of thinkers from Scotland (part of Britain) who made enormous intellectual contribution to the Enlightenment. David Hume, Adam Smith, and William Robertson were among the main such Enlightenment thinkers. Among their most significant contribution to Enlightenment thought was the emphasis on political economy. Hume and Smith emphasized on commerce, manufacture and technological innovation rather than on agriculture or bullion as the best means to achieve wealth. Moreover, they envisaged a possibility of each country growing together because the commercial wealth was ever increasing. The path to become rich would be common to all, at least to all relatively developed European countries. Increasing trade and commerce would provide opportunity and incentive for the manufacturers and even landowners to invest. Adam Smith criticized the restrictive mercantilist trade practices which relied on pressure, monopolies, and control of markets. He instead favoured open commerce free from the control of the guilds and the government.

The thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment offered strong opposition to Rousseau’s trenchant critique of modern society. They argued that economic life of the pre-modern society was inherently precarious, and it was only commerce and manufacture, conducted as freely as possible, that would create wealth required for the economic improvement of all countries and all classes. Such arguments proved so influential that, after Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* most thinkers and even policy-makers started considering commerce as crucial to an understanding of the modern society. Now, political economy was accepted as the most important and new science of society which would have universal application. It was one of the greatest contributions made by Enlightenment thought not only towards a knowledge of human society but also towards improving its material conditions. This vision offered prospects of great material

progress in the present world dealing a huge blow to the religious idea of freedom from misery in the next world. It made possible the secularisation of society at a much broader level than could be possible by a simple separation of religion and state. Moreover, the idea of free commerce projected a larger world beyond the boundaries of individual countries; it was truly international in scope.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss the main influences on Enlightenment thought.

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- 2) Write a note on the important ideas of Enlightenment.

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9.6 SOME IMPORTANT ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS

In this section we will discuss the ideas of some important French thinkers of 'High Enlightenment' whose ideas became crucial to the posterity for a long time to come.

9.6.1 Montesquieu (1689-1755)

Montesquieu, a French political and historical thinker, was among the most important Enlightenment thinkers whose famous work *The Spirit of Laws* (1748) is considered to have inaugurated the high Enlightenment. He had a strong deterministic view of human development. On the basis of his analysis of many countries, he argued the primacy of climate and geography in determining the nature of the various governments. Thus, a hot and humid climate gave rise to despotism, the temperate climate encouraged the growth of democracies in various forms, the most favoured being the constitutional monarchies. Moreover, he also argued that the size of the ruled area also made a difference. Thus, a large territory could be governed only through despotism, a monarchy is suitable for medium-sized area, while a republic could survive only in a small area. Even people were different in different regions. Thus, the people who lived in cold climates are strong, vigorous, and courageous, while those living in hot climates were weak, sensuous, and volatile. He praised the British system of constitutional government and advocated separation of powers between various organs of the state. According to him, only the rule by constitution could ensure that public order

and freedom of the individual could co-exist. He also did not believe in the divine origins and divine rights of the kings and argued that the power of the king was derived from the people and not God. Montesquieu looked up at the nobility to restrict the unbridled powers of despotic kings.

9.6.2 Voltaire (1694-1778)

Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet,) was the most popular Enlightenment thinker who was read very widely. He was very witty and sarcastic and attacked the Church and the priests with utmost vigour. He believed in uniform human nature and universalism. He criticized the determinism of Montesquieu. According to him, all 'civilized nations everywhere, beginning with India and ending with Europe', possessed the same truth. But he also thought that there was marked differences between a 'civilized' and a 'non-civilized' society. While the Asian and European societies were civilized, the African and pre-modern American societies were uncivilized.

Voltaire's severest attack was against the system of religion prevailing in France concentrating a lot of powers in the Church. He, however, praised Confucianism and Hinduism as containing relevant truths for humankind. He also believed that a natural religion based on reason was necessary to maintain order in the society and to give people hope. Without any such system there would be chaos and anarchy. He supported a form of toleration which was to be worldly and non-religious whereby 'the physical and moral well-being of society' would be preserved and fanaticism and dogmatism would be rejected.

He was also a great admirer of Britain praising it for its constitutional government, free press, religious tolerance, and commercial prowess. In contrast to Montesquieu, however, Voltaire favoured the centralized monarchy to protect common people from the oppression of the nobles.

9.6.3 Diderot (1713-1784)

Denis Diderot is famous for preparing the monumental *Encyclopedia* (in association with d'Alembert and initiated in 1751) which became the most familiar landmark of Enlightenment. It consisted of 60,000 articles and 2,885 illustrations making 28 volumes. It claimed to collect, organize and classify all knowledge from all over the world. Almost all the major Enlightenment thinkers in France contributed article for it. Despite its bulk and price, the *Encyclopedia* became quite popular with the middle classes and reached to almost all the countries in Europe. It provided a sharp focus to the anti-establishment stance of the Enlightenment and riled the French authorities so much that one of its volumes was banned and Diderot was jailed for some time.

Diderot worked for many years to complete this in 1765, and he himself contributed about 5,000 articles. Through his writings, he took a radical stance going against the prevailing opinion in France and the West in general. He strongly emphasized on rationality and laws of nature. Diderot criticized the oppression and exploitation of women and the system of male domination. He condemned slavery and advocated legal equality among human beings. The stand taken by Diderot and the *Encyclopedia* in general was against monarchy and in support of representative government, sometimes going as far as popular sovereignty, coming close to demanding a republic.

9.6.4 Rousseau (1712-1778)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau occupied an ambiguous place within the Enlightenment because he put equal emphasis on reason and emotions. He believed that spontaneity and instinct were as much part of human nature as rationality, order, and laws. In opposition to many others, he held that history did not represent a uniform and linear progress. He believed that the society changed from freedom to unfreedom, from relative equality to inequality, and from pastoral-agricultural setting to urbanization, growth of cities, congestion, and corruption of morals. Rousseau offered a strong critique of the modern society and its moral decline. At the economic level, he advocated a balanced growth between the rural and urban areas so that there was no unilateral transfer of massive population from the villages to the cities.

Rousseau believed the primitive societies were harmonious, non-hierarchical, simple, and therefore ideal. The modern civilization, on the other hand, was corrupt, acrimonious, mad after wealth, and non-egalitarian. In his famous book *The Social Contract* (1762), he attempted to outline how in contemporary societies, the people associate with each other for their safety and for getting justice, but still remain free individuals. In line with Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau also thought that there occurred a 'social contract' where the free-born individual surrenders his / her natural rights to the 'general will' to find a community, order, and protection. However, in contrast to his predecessors, Rousseau conceived that this surrender of rights was not to an autocratic state or to a dynastic ruler but to citizen-rulers who were equal and on the same ground with others. In contrast to some other Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Rousseau did not believe in the future enlightenment of the dynastic rulers. For him, sovereignty was reposed in the people and not in the kings. Moreover, there was no divine sanction of sovereignty.

9.6.5 Turgot (1727-81)

Anne Robert Jacques Turgot was a French economist who also served as Minister in the French government. He was one of the earliest and strongest proponent of the idea of progress. This progress was to be linear, completely secular, and human-oriented rather than divine. As per his universalistic thinking, the societies all over the world would follow the same path of linear and progressive development. In this sense, progress was inevitable in every society. There would be three stages of progress: from hunting to pastoral to agricultural. In the first stage, it was passion and not reason which would be supreme, and the human society would be in the savage state. This stage was not suitable for the creation of culture. In the next stage, the society got wealthier and communication increased. But, due to high mobility, people at large could not develop common bonds, and no records could be kept. Finally, with the coming of agriculture, settled life, and generation of surplus, the civilization emerged and human culture took a higher form. It was from this time onward, according to Turgot, that progress became a real and almost inevitable possibility. Turgot emphasized that progress was uniquely human and was possible due to accumulation of knowledge, memory, and written records through several generations. He sharply distinguished human world from the natural world. While in nature the movement is cyclical, in human world it has been mostly linear, collective and, after modern science, inevitable. The wheel of history could not now be turned back; it is bound to move forward and upwards.

9.7 LEGACIES OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The legacies of Enlightenment are so deep and wide-ranging that even today we are considered to be living in the post-Enlightenment world, a world imbued with the ideas broadly generated during the period of Enlightenment. The first and foremost of these is the belief in Reason as separate from and opposed to tradition and blind faith. The belief in the critical scrutiny of various phenomena has been an enduring legacy of Enlightenment. The belief in human potential, in science, and in progress still continues. The idea that rational human beings are able to shape their own destinies without any appeal to divine authorities derived from Enlightenment. Enlightenment put forward the idea that all human beings, anywhere in the world, possessed the same faculties of reasoning and intellect, even though all of them were not in the same stage of development. Moreover, the Enlightenment idea of popular sovereignty has become much wider and deeper. Human freedom has become a core value in today's world and all forms of unfreedom, such as slavery, bondage etc. are criticized. Enlightenment generated the ideas of a broadly rational, individualistic, secular, and progressive world in which most of the humans believe even now. The modern world, at least in its thinking, is a legacy of Enlightenment. Most scholars now associate various aspects of modernity with Enlightenment. In some of its manifestations, Enlightenment can be linked with a variety of modern values such as cosmopolitanism, universalism, rationalism, belief in scientific method and continuous progress, secularism, tolerance, human rights, democracy, and even gender equality.

On the other hand, sometimes consciously but also unintentionally, Enlightenment reinforced the superiority of the modern European countries over the rest of the world. Enlightenment's formula of the stages of development relegated non-European peoples to the lower stages from which they were to be rescued by the more developed Europeans. Modern European values were put forward as norms for the rest of the world, and it was considered as the responsibility of the Europeans to educate and liberate the non-Europeans from their superstitions and bondage to priests and kings. Thus, while they were critical of colonial plunder and exploitation through violence, many Enlightenment thinkers still believed that the Europeans had a role to play in the colonies. Even a radical Enlightenment thinker like Condorcet suggested for the colonial people that 'we would become for them ... generous liberators'. And Rousseau stated that the Europeans should 'force them to be free'. Such statements provided ample justification for the later imperialist 'civilizing mission' in the colonial territories. So, it can be said that, in some respects, the Enlightenment left a contradictory legacy which preached both liberation and domination – liberation from superstition, priesthood, and despotism, but domination by modern European values, modern science, and, if needed, by modern European rulers.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What are the legacies of Enlightenment for contemporary world?

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- 2) Discuss the ideas of two important Enlightenment thinkers.

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9.8 LET US SUM UP

Enlightenment is regarded as the harbinger of the modern world at intellectual level. Its emphasis on rational thinking and on the individual paved the way for breaking away from traditional and religious dogmas and superstitions. Enlightenment thinkers derived from the earlier intellectual movements in science, rationalism and empiricism to put forward their own ideas about nature and society. These thinkers, also known as *philosophes*, believed in scientific method of observation, experimentation, and analysis for the study of society, and doubted the validity of divine revelation and miracles. Individualism, rationalism, universalism, tolerance, and liberalism were some important legacies of the Enlightenment.

9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 9.3
- 2) See Section 9.5

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 9.7
- 2) See Section 9.6