

# 1

## The Setting

### SPACE EXPANDED AND FILLED ANEW

BETWEEN 1500 AND 1700, Westerners discovered two new worlds: one in the heavens, the other on earth. These discoveries coincided with and helped further a vast expansion of commerce that brought yet more peoples and places into the Western orbit. Celestial and terrestrial space were reconfigured. Making sense of these monumental discoveries required new thought and language.

Christianity had to rise to the intellectual challenge presented by the new spatial reality. The findings of the new science displaced the earth from the center of the universe and thereby raised doubts about all traditional explanations. The discovery of new continents and peoples had an even more immediate effect. Why did the new peoples being discovered believe what they believed, having never heard the Christian message? Some could be converted; others not so readily. Missionaries discovered an almost unimaginable variety of beliefs and soon began to debate the meanings of this diversity. Did everyone have a notion of God, or were some newly discovered peoples natural atheists? The Greek and Roman authorities

long revered in Europe had not the slightest inkling of the existence of the Americas. Western peoples could no longer rely on the coherence and order long provided by Christian theology. In this way, the new spatial realities provided the setting wherein enlightened ideas first emerged.

Physico-theology was one of the first attempts to give coherence to the physical reality of a mathematically knowable world. Its conserving goal was to augment piety and exalt the Grand Architect, to redefine the coherence and order of Christianity. The new physics of the seventeenth century—heliocentric, mechanical, and mathematical—could reinforce the theology of order and providential design. Science in the service of Christian orthodoxy became a goal championed particularly by English natural philosophers, Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle, and most remarkably Isaac Newton (figure 1). They aimed physico-theology against the new heresies of the age: atheism, deism, and materialism. In doing so, they fashioned what became a moderate version of enlightened ideas that embraced science, eschewed doctrinal quarrels among Christians, and endorsed religious toleration.<sup>1</sup> The voices of physico-theology constituted the chorus that emanated from the liberal segment of the Church of England. Thanks in good part to Samuel Clarke, Newton's friend and interpreter, this segment exerted influence everywhere in Protestant Europe through personal contacts and translated sermons.

By the end of the war-torn seventeenth century, more than a science-based Christian orthodoxy was needed. The political crises of the century—revolution in three kingdoms of the British Isles, the removal of Spanish authority in the northern Netherlands, the devastation in Central Europe caused by the Thirty Years War—required new responses to political reality. Hobbes, Locke, the English republican and Commonwealth



FIGURE 1. Isaac Newton, whose science became one of the anchors for enlightened thought. (ID# 1775740). Courtesy of Bridgeman Images.

men, and not least, in the Dutch Republic, Grotius and Spinoza attempted to redefine the political order and, in the process, confounded aspects of Christian orthodoxy. They laid the foundation upon which enlightened approaches to society and government would rest. Each in his way refused to endorse

monarchical absolutism and the divine rights of kings. They invested the power of the state in social arrangements that offered security, the protection of property, and justice in return for the consent (however tacit) of the governed. Even Hobbes rested state power on a contract among the people to embrace the mortal god, Leviathan.

Aside from war and revolution, there were still other challenges to spatial order and coherence. The spread of money had the effect of revolutionizing the production and consumption of all commodities, creating new transactions, histories, and affairs. In European society, new forms of urban association emerged, and these conferred upon participants, as John Dewey wrote many centuries later, the means “of unlocking energies hitherto pent in.”<sup>2</sup> In short, faced with new dynamics and social arrangements, Europeans and later American colonists responded with language that reordered their understanding of spatial reality. To give but one example, late in the eighteenth century Thomas Jefferson broke out of the classical republican vision he inherited to argue that rather than being small, a republic could stretch across an entire Continent, from sea to shining sea.

Space conquered and negotiated by the imperialist impulse introduced unprecedented power relations between subject and conqueror. The European nation-states and then the newly created American state possessed sophisticated armaments and armies, ships and horses—accompanied by disease and the will to enslave. Their sometimes brutal actions, when reported, forced European minds in the direction of distant peoples and customs that needed to be understood. Whether the Spanish absolutist monarchy or the Dutch republican government undertook or endorsed imperialist ventures to extend their power, every occasion required knowledge of the spaces,



peoples, and heavens. Never before in Western history had such an expansion of spatial knowledge been both possible and necessary.

Therein lay the roots of the Enlightenment: the unintended consequence of commercial and state-sponsored expansion. Paradoxically, as the power of absolute monarchies and the clergy that supported them grew in Europe—augmented as they were by global conquest—inventive responses to new spatial realities multiplied. Their combined weight secularized space and removed not only its boundaries but also its supernatural powers. They undermined belief in heaven and hell and the authority of absolutist regimes. By the 1770s, major theorists from the Scottish school in Edinburgh to the French *philosophes* in Paris furthered the corrosive process by providing new vocabularies that denigrated empires, state-supported orthodoxies, and the clergy who benefited from them.

The combined impact of the subversive literature that began in the 1650s and continued into the 1790s ultimately delegitimized courts and monarchs. From the clandestine literature, early in the century to the abbé Raynal, Diderot, Rousseau, the abolitionists in its last quarter, and Herder and Kant in the 1790s, every support for unchecked authority in church and state, as well as empire, had been challenged, mocked, dismissed, or decried as immoral.

Early in the period, travel literature, complete with engravings, told of new peoples in the Americas and Africa about whom both the Bible and ancient writings had been entirely silent. Their novelty was matched only by the strangeness of their behavior. The Spanish conquerors found indigenous people in what we now know as Mexico who practiced human sacrifice, wore little clothing, and occasionally ate their victims.<sup>3</sup> The space opened by new peoples and continents fired

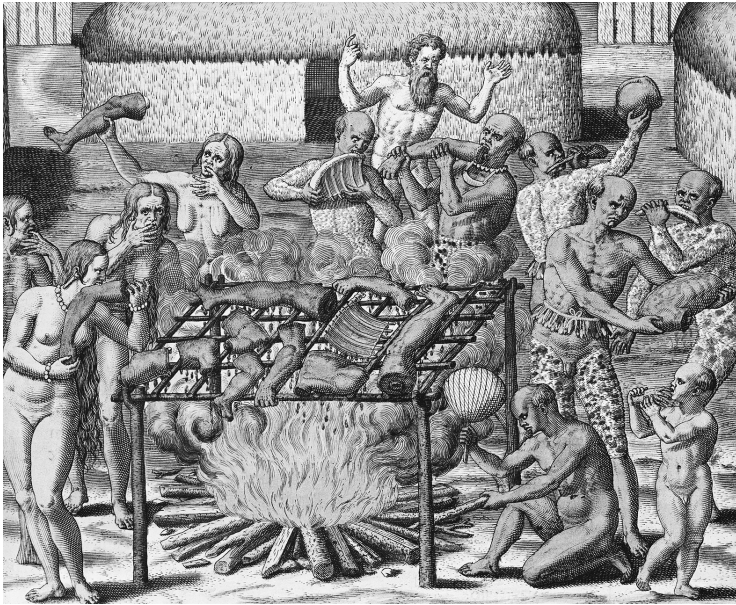


FIGURE 2. De Bry's depiction of cannibalism. Theodore de Bry (1528–98) (ID# 164722). Courtesy of Bridgeman Images.

imperialist fantasy, to be sure. Just as important in the *longue durée*, imperial space also licensed bold and heterodox free-thinking in the service of trying to make sense out of the previously unimaginable.

Images of these new Amerindians were widely circulated by German and Dutch printing houses, among which the de Bry family in Frankfurt produced the most striking and bloodcurdling (figure 2). Such imagery only emphasized the challenge faced by the Iberian Church and monarchy, whose declared purpose was the conversion and “civilizing” of the indigenous peoples. The ultimate irony of the European expansion into global space—accompanied by such sanctimonious intentions—lay



FIGURE 3. Ferdinand Alvarez de Toledo eating a child. Courtesy of Wikimedia.

in the gradual undermining of European religious certainty and political authority. It became possible in Dutch propaganda, for example, to depict the Spanish authorities as tyrants and baby-eating cannibals (figure 3). Anti-authoritarian responses to European conquest and exploitation emerged only gradually

as people tried to make sense out of the recently discovered earthly and heavenly spaces.

No less exotic than the Americas, China and Africa also entered European consciousness, but they elicited wildly different responses. By and large, the Chinese were respected for the longevity of their civilization, and freethinkers even compared Buddhism to the natural religion that they espoused. Such was the approach taken by Bernard Picart, engraver, and Jean Frederick Bernard, writer and publisher of the first even-handed attempt to understand all of the known religions of the world, *Ceremonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723–43) (figure 4).<sup>4</sup>

Africa was actually far less known than North and Central America, yet even there Picart and Bernard tried to understand the religions of people never personally experienced. Illustrations of ceremonies in honor of their deities appear along with pages describing birth and death ceremonies. The Picart-Bernard effort became justly famous as the first attempt to relativize all religions. This conclusion was the exact opposite of what the Christian missionaries at work on every continent had intended.

After roughly the year 1600, literate Westerners (and many of the illiterate) knew that vast, new, and inhabited continents filled large portions of the globe. Thinking about the world outside Europe had commenced irretrievably. But the expansion of space did not stop there. Looking into the heavens entailed new knowledge about their structure—even if thousands still doubted the Copernican system that placed the sun at the center of the universe. Also by 1700, the highly educated knew that there now existed a mathematical law to explain how the force of universal gravitation ordered the heavens and made them knowable. The almanacs might still talk about the role played by the stars in determining human fate, but followers





FIGURE 4. Frontispiece to the *Ceremonies et coutumes*, illustrating all the world's religions, with only the Catholic Church being depicted in a negative light.

of Newtonian science thought little about such influences for which no solid proof existed. At one time, heavenly space possessed the power to influence the health and well-being of mortals. After 1687, space in the *Principia* is empty and neutral, as desacralized as Henry VIII's former monastic lands.<sup>5</sup>

The macrocosm of global and heavenly space framed the growing diversity of public space in the microcosm of European cities.<sup>6</sup> The “public sphere,” “civil society,” and “sociability” are all terms used to describe the relatively new spatial associations available to urban dwellers. Drawn to cities by ever-expanding markets, merchants, lawyers, stockbrokers, ladies of the *salon*, denizens of coffee shops and cafés stayed to see and be seen, and to read the burgeoning supply of newspapers and journals. They invented and filled urban spaces separate from court and king as well as from family dwellings (figure 5). When so occupied, they said their efforts aimed to correct “the want of a regular and publick encouragement of learning.” Small societies would publish books by their members, enhance their profits, all the while instituting “a republic of letters for the promoting of arts and sciences.”<sup>7</sup>

By midcentury, a London social life could revolve solely around eating clubs and the pub life that went with them. In the 1770s, John Wilkes dined nightly with the governing elite of the city and frequently, as his diary notes, at a “Tavern with the supporters of the Bill of Rights.” The Beef Steak Club, the Irish Club, and the Antigallican Club helped fill the spatial vastness of Wilkes's London, where Benjamin Franklin occasionally joined in the festivities.<sup>8</sup> By the second half of the century, if not well before, the task of policing and spying on this or any other great metropolis had become formidable. The city also offered a visual feast for the curious, as brilliantly captured by artist and engraver William Hogarth (figure 6).



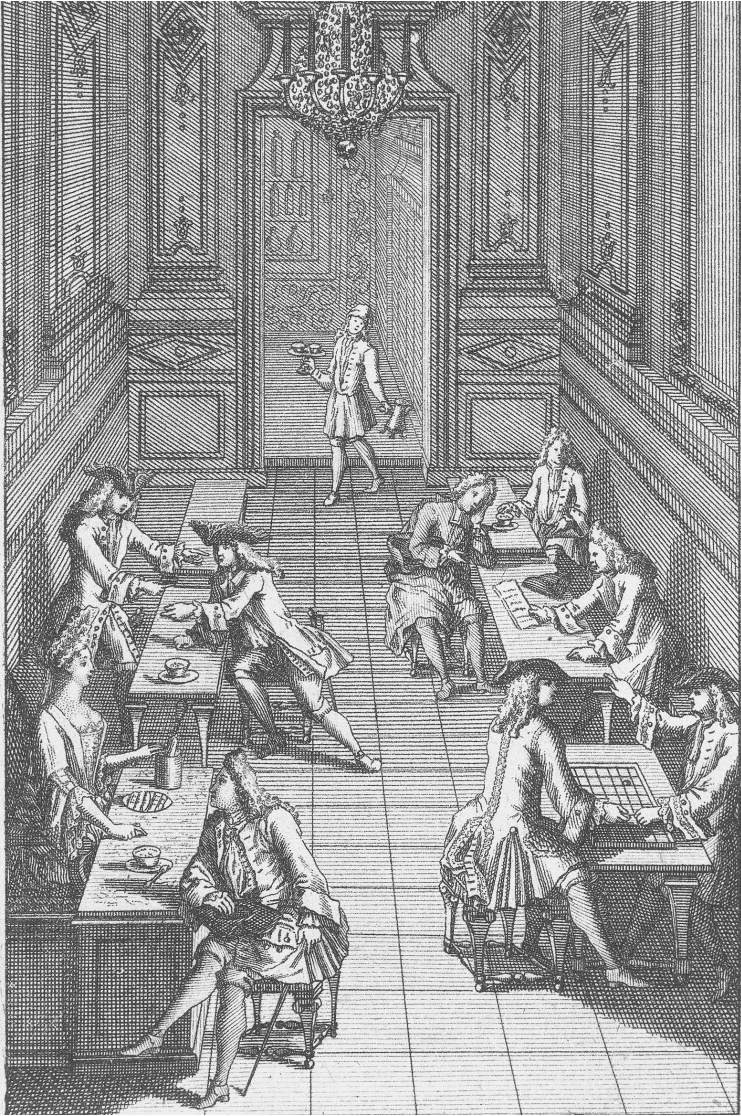


FIGURE 5. Early eighteenth-century example of casual sociability.  
Bernard Picart (ID# 516565). Courtesy of Bridgeman Images.



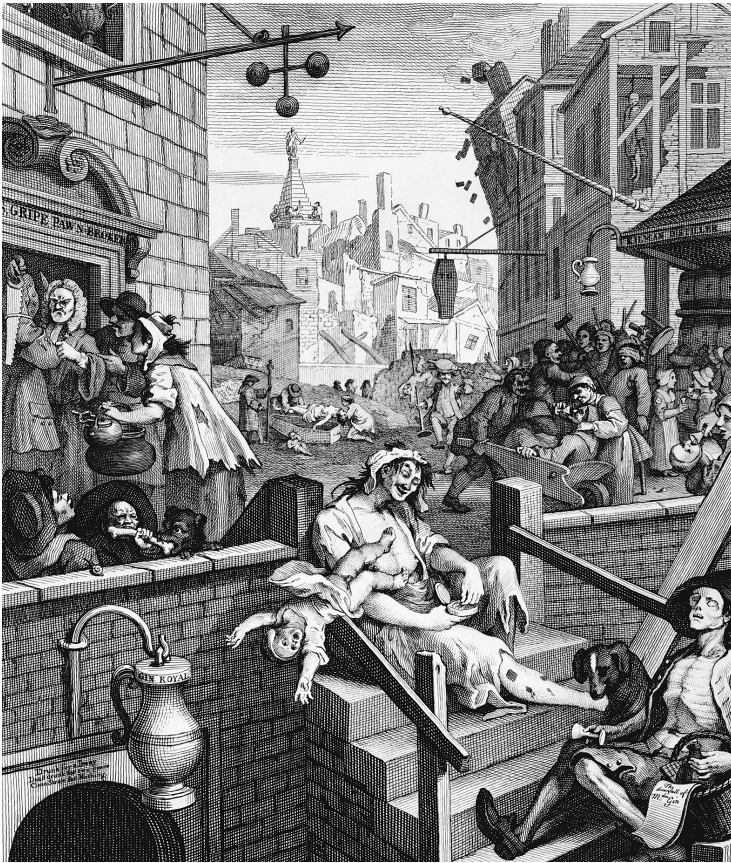


FIGURE 6. Hogarth's representation of the foibles of Londoners. *Gin Lane*, William Hogarth (1697–1764) (ID# 265846). Courtesy of Bridgeman Images.

Most aptly named, *The Spectator* burst upon the London literary scene in 1711 and was an instant success. The journalist as spectator saw himself as living “in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species; by which means I have made myself a Speculative Statesman, Soldier, Merchant, and Artisan.” He dared to take on so many roles in part because

he claimed to have visited every city in Europe.<sup>9</sup> His *métier* as gossip, raconteur, and man-about-town signaled a new urban vitality. Not surprisingly, the Dutch cities were among the first to imitate the originally English genre of spectatorial literature.<sup>10</sup> So too, new world cities like Boston sported imitations that claimed to be the work of a society of gentlemen. There, in 1727, the journal *Proteus Echo* sought to satisfy the curiosity of “All Mankind,” for they “burn with an unquenchable Ardour after Knowledge.” It sought to provide “Publick usefulness.”<sup>11</sup>

Cities were also the natural habitat of publishers and would-be philosophes. In the period after 1650, cities from Amsterdam to Paris, Edinburgh to London grew in size and continued to do so throughout the century. In the seventeenth century, Naples was also one of the largest cities in Europe, and we know that in this period Italian bookshops, cafés, and even hat shops bristled with anti-clerical and anti-doctrinal gossip (figure 7). The Inquisition barely kept up with the irreverent banter to be found in such public spaces.<sup>12</sup>

The reality of global space framed not only civil society but also the imaginary realm of mercantile life. The central lobby of the Amsterdam City Hall, built between 1648 and 1665, contains a marble floor in which images of the two hemispheres of the world are inlaid in copper. Statues grace the scene and lay out themes such as “Peace,” “Providence,” and “Righteousness.” The mercantile elite of the city walked upon this floor while discussing news and global trade.

Less grand in size or aspirations, other cities throughout Europe with more than 30,000 people—like Newcastle, The Hague, or Berlin—became more numerous. Strasbourg, Danzig, and Breslau sported around 40,000, and Vienna had about 100,000. If the curious could afford books and find coffee houses where the like-minded gathered in relative anonymity—only cities of



FIGURE 7. A rowdy version of eighteenth-century socializing.  
(ID# 2987207). Courtesy of Bridgeman Images.

a decent size provided such haunts—amid the chatter people might begin to think new and unorthodox thoughts. A circle that met in The Hague in 1710 called itself a chapter of “the Knights of Jubilation,” and its publishing members brought to the public the clandestine treatise that named Jesus, Moses, and Mohammed as the three great impostors. The denizens of urban space flouted the authorities and in plain sight invented the clandestine. The genre became the venue for the most radical ideas of the age.

About the same year in both London and Paris, cabarets and clubs sprang up where men made marriages together; the spying authorities called their occupants by the derogatory term “sodomites.” The Parisian coterie took women’s names and fashioned ceremonies for “la Reception des Prozelites.”<sup>13</sup> Other far more respectable Paris cafés offered elegant and decorously furnished settings to entice the wealthy and aristocratic.<sup>14</sup>

Elite French women disdained smoking, and hence it was banned in the elegant cafés of the capital. English and Dutch public houses evinced no such inhibition and also provided newspapers to be read by patrons. In that first decade of the new century, London taverns existed where working women supped and engaged in ribald banter.<sup>15</sup> Among literate, more leisured women, novels and journals offered access to the empathy and polite knowledge that came to be associated with enlightened culture.

By 1700, urban spaces offered unprecedented displays of the outrageous, daring, and free. In Amsterdam, hundreds of free blacks originally from Africa, mostly men, congregated.<sup>16</sup> By 1730, male homosexuality, real or imagined, led to a vast persecution in which hundreds of men were queried or prosecuted, and on occasion executed. In Amsterdam between 1730 and 1732, thirty-five men were summoned, tortured, and banished for what the “confession books” labeled as “anaal contact.”<sup>17</sup>

The expanding commerce in goods and staples matched a growing consciousness of the once unspoken, or unimagined, or feared. There was no choice but to take in the possibility of an infinite universe and within it an earth inhabited by new and previously unimagined peoples. Few urban places escaped access to the new science and, armed with it, theorists debated the original nature of humankind, the process by which civilizing occurred, the nature of authority, and the terms under which obedience to it was due. Some people came to the cities in search of the new literature that tried to explain a vastly altered spatial universe.

Is it little wonder, then, that any urban space could nurture free-thinking? A small city like Namur, in the highly censored Austrian Netherlands (that is, Belgium), had about a dozen bookstores. When the authorities raided them in 1730, they found what they labeled “bad books”: French translations of works by John Locke and Machiavelli, along with the anonymous and risqué. A decade



later, when a local merchant-tanner died, his library was found to contain works by Voltaire, as well as fashionable encyclopedias of the era.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, outside Paris in 1728, a hapless priest got himself arrested for claiming that Jesus, Moses, and Mohammed had been impostors.<sup>19</sup> The claim was old news by the time the curate got hold of the *Traité des trois imposteurs*, if that is what he was reading. As was so often the case in the stories told by the authorities, the heretical required its own social space. They claimed that the curé had made himself the head of an assembly of like-minded followers. In faraway Saxony, a good ten years earlier, the authorities had been searching the bookstores in the hope of confiscating the very same tract.<sup>20</sup> Around 1710, as we now know, deists and pantheists in the Dutch Republic—self-described knights or, as they said, “brothers”—had written all or part of it, and their publisher associates put it out in a now rare edition of 1719. Around 1700, writing in Latin, another bold spirit probably at work in Halle made the same argument. To this day, we are not sure about the author’s identity.

If Namur was bad, Paris was far worse. Throughout the eighteenth century, the police hunted and sometimes caught the purveyors of books “against religion, the state and good morals.” This illicit commerce provided the infrastructure wherein enlightened ideas found expression. In 1704, one Antoine Galoche fell into the hands of the authorities and his police file singled out his traffic in a new genre of literature, pornography. Books with titles such as *Venus in the Cloister* clearly announced their subject matter. In the 1740s, a gang of seven engraved, circulated, and sold works about the phallic god Priapus and salacious stories about “Dom Bougre,” a clerical practitioner of buggery.<sup>21</sup> Other dealers caught in the police net went to prison with the verdict that they were peddling “works

injurious to the government.” Still others specialized in satires against the king, Louis XV, and his mistress. One denizen of the prisons said, “the king is an imbecile and a tyrant.” Even a captain in the king’s cavalry was caught distributing “very indecent libels” against his majesty and his mistress.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1740s, the French police spied upon the new forms of sociability—in one case imported from Britain. From London, the freemasons moved on to the Continent, first to Rotterdam by 1720 and then to The Hague and Paris. Known or unknown to the authorities, the masonic *Constitutions* of 1723 advised the brothers that “in ancient Times Masons were charg’d in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation, whatever it was, yet ’tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all Men agree.” Hardly a ringing endorsement of religious orthodoxy! Masonic principles were universal and global: “we are also of all Nations, Tongues, Kindreds, and Languages, and are resolv’d against all Politicks, as what never yet conduc’d to the Welfare of the Lodge.”<sup>23</sup>

The French authorities found the freemasons suspicious because their rituals made them look like a new religion and because they had attracted aristocratic membership. The new fraternity with its universalist claims could be plotting a cabal against the government; hence their literature had to be confiscated and the distributor put behind bars. One of the earliest French members we can actually find is identified as “a Negro in the King’s Guard.” He broke bread with other brothers in a Paris lodge.<sup>24</sup> It had become fashionable for monarchs to display the sweep of their global power by using Africans as soldiers or valets; this one was a trumpeter.

By the 1730s, the lodges had made their way to Russia, where they played an important role in the movement toward the light.<sup>25</sup> As in Sweden, the Russian lodges functioned as areas

where influence could be exerted on government officials. The lodges also facilitated British influence in Russia, and in the early years Jacobites played a significant role in the spread of masonic practices. By the reign of Catherine the Great, the Viennese lodges were also places where progressive intellectuals congregated with aristocrats and court officials.

Some masonic lodges created a new cosmopolitan space. They brought veritable strangers together who crossed class and race boundaries—at least for those who could afford the dues. Many French lodges gradually began to admit Protestants, although Jews and Muslims were never welcomed. That intolerance was not the case in London or Amsterdam. By the 1780s, French lodges for men and women placed images of four women within the heart of the lodge. They represented the four parts of the world—Africa, America, Asia, and Europe. The global reach, however oppressive it was for non-Westerners, also allowed Europeans to imagine themselves as true world citizens.<sup>26</sup>

The lodges remained suspect in Catholic Europe well into the second half of the century. In Strasbourg in 1757, the authorities shut down a lodge on the grounds that it was a hotbed of licentious behavior. The same happened to lodges even in Protestant Switzerland. After the pope condemned membership in the lodges in 1738, men were denied absolution in confession for being members. Condemnation did not stop Catholics from belonging, and priests who joined were described as “enlightened.”<sup>27</sup> In the 1760s, 40 percent of Dublin freemasons were Catholics.<sup>28</sup>

Many lodges put great emphasis on Christian behavior and described themselves as “schools of virtue.”<sup>29</sup> The virtue being sought was closer, however, to the ideals of classical republicanism than to the traditional teaching of the churches. Masonic



virtue focused on a robust public spiritedness, on attention to internal governance, and on the ideal of friendship as the social cement of the lodges, hence of the larger society.<sup>30</sup> By the 1780s, French lodges sent representatives to Paris, where they voted not by estates but by one man, one vote.

Urban spaces could also offer new religious opportunities and hence dangers for any government. Very early in the century, the French army had routed Protestants living in the south, in an area known as the Cevennes. Out of that persecution came a millenarian group, the French prophets, who made their way through the cities of Western Europe prophesizing the demise of Louis XIV and the coming end of the world. Free-thinkers in the Dutch Republic were horrified by their antics, but in London, Isaac Newton came out to see them and to consult with their scribe (who wrote down the prophecies). He was Newton's close friend, the Swiss Protestant Fatio de Duillier.<sup>31</sup> While Newtonian science became a springboard for enlightened approaches to religion, the master himself remained very much a seventeenth-century Protestant given to millenarian sentiments, convinced that the pope was the anti-Christ. Yet it was Newtonian space, empty, capable of geometrical exposition as it was understood in the eighteenth century, that came to prevail.

The prophets assumed that time would come to an end and so too would space. They took aim against the anti-Christ and avoided Paris for obvious reasons. There too, various other forms of what the age called "enthusiasm" could readily be found in the capital. The *convulsionnaires* assembled around the tomb of a dead priest in the parish of Saint-Médard. He was believed to work miracles, and followers displayed signs of being possessed by his powers. They would have been harmless enough, except for the fact that clergy who were attracted to an

austere reform of Catholicism known as Jansenism also looked for divine intervention to prove the justness of their cause. The monarchy saw such clergy as a threat, and the papacy condemned Jansenism in a bull of 1713. The Jansenists took up the cause of the Saint-Médard priest and his followers. The curious German Lutheran traveler Hermann Reimarus lamented, “we now have fanatics, inspirationists, convulsionnaires, just as the Ancients had their sibyls and pythians.”<sup>32</sup> Once possessed by spiritual forces, whether in Paris or the Cevennes, enthusiasts posed a threat to established authority that it, in turn, was keen to condemn.

Undeterred, the Jansenists and their supporters produced books that flourished in the same semi-clandestine market used by the freethinkers and pornographers. Arrests were swift, and they reveal that the same people, including priests, could be distributing pro-Jansenist tracts along with the heretical and salacious.<sup>33</sup> Cities permitted strange bedfellows and easily gave the authorities the message that all illegal actors—pornographers, freethinkers, Jansenists, even freemasons—could make common cause and work to undermine both church and state. The irreligious knew that *convulsionnaires* and Jansenists were their enemies, but remarkably the police kept their files in the same dossier. Ever vigilant for conspiracies, they even imagined that the freemasons had their own pope, as reported by anonymous informants.<sup>34</sup>

By the 1770s, the patience of the French censors wore thin. They longed for an opportunity to strike at this Dutch-centered international commerce in forbidden books: “it is time to set an example in this republican nation, one that is capable of intimidating the unfortunates who seek refuge there in the hope of impunity.”<sup>35</sup> On this occasion, the provocation grew out of information gathered after the arrest and interrogation

of the widow Stockdorff, who also traded in the Dutch Republic. After journeying eight days from Strasbourg to Paris in the company of two abbés, the widow proceeded to seek out every materialist and pornographic work on the market. We know about her activities because the police had been following her and made a copy of her shopping list. She engaged in an international traffic that included various French and Dutch cities; hence the frustration of the authorities. In the 1770s, nothing came of the censor's threat against the widow and the Dutch Republic. A very different French force entered the Republic in 1795, when the Revolutionary army invaded Amsterdam. They were met with jubilation by the city's main masonic lodge, and all assembled sang "La Marseillaise."

In the decades before 1789, associational life everywhere in Europe, both licit and semi-clandestine, expanded. In Britain and Ireland, the freemasons were only one of several types of new associations that flourished in the capital as well as in the provinces. In the Dutch Republic, eating and drinking clubs for elites competed for attention with societies dedicated to useful reforms. By the 1770s, the societies dedicated to *het Nut* ("the useful") had metastasized and boded ill for the *stadtholder* ("head of state") and oligarchs who governed the localities and the Republic. In the German states where literacy was less common, the universities still dominated the public sphere, and within them clubs and cliques were the norm. Just about every enlightened thinker from Lessing to Herder and Kant found a home in one or another university and club setting. Only the Prussian court in Berlin offered a viable and fashionable alternative.<sup>36</sup> It became a refuge for French philosophes on the run and intellectuals like Voltaire.

The space filled by voluntary association, in which strangers could become acquaintances, also included the courts of Eu-

rope. In Vienna earlier in the century, Prince Eugene of Savoy retired after a successful military career in the Low Countries fighting against France. His court became a magnet for travelers, bibliophiles, freethinkers, and religious reformers from all over Europe. The Italian Lodovico Antonio Muratori (d. 1750) brought a reformed Catholicism to Eugene's court, and from that entrée stemmed one source for the reforming efforts later in the century of the Austrian emperor, Joseph II.<sup>37</sup>

Despite never having left Europe, Eugene owned a globally focused library of over 15,000 books and manuscripts. It contained an almost priceless "Blue Atlas" that in forty-six folio pages displayed the entire world. It was complemented by a vast collection of travel literature to places like Russia and the Levant. In addition, Eugene possessed histories of the Scandinavian lands, Russia, Hungary, Croatia, the Near East, east and south Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Eugene also specialized in religious and theological literature, with a polyglot Bible, works by and about the early Protestant reformers, a translation of a Chinese work about Confucius, but also works by known free-thinkers like John Toland.

All the major seventeenth-century philosophers and men of science had a place in Eugene's library, as did important travel accounts of Turkey, Persia, the Indies, the Americas, Lebanon, and Syria (by Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Louis Hennepin, Jean Baptiste Labat, Joseph Lafitau, Garcilaso de la Vega, and Jean La-Roque). Prince Eugene could also consult medical texts by European and Arabic doctors. Both new worlds—on earth and in the heavens—resided in his palace in Vienna.<sup>38</sup>

Fittingly, the first global atlases described "the theatre of the earthly orb," an unprecedented stage upon which anyone in principle could be an actor.<sup>39</sup> Many of these books had been made for the new European nation-states or the trading companies that

now traveled the world. They were practical manuals that also provided the occasion for flights of fancy, some of them quite naughty.

The old Paris national library used to keep an especially judgmental category of books in *le cabinet d'enfer*—the “collection from hell.” Overwhelmingly, the category contained pornographic works, some making plentiful use of the travel guides and manuals. The librarian who created it may have assumed that the souls of readers would wind up there some day. The particularly outrageous *Histoire du Prince Apprius* (that is, Priapus) in 1729 claimed to be drawn from “the splendors of the world since Creation.” The book said that it originated from a manuscript in the library of the king of Prussia and was published in Constantinople. Not a word of that was true. The kingdom described in the history was fancifully inhabited by buggers, tribades (lesbians), “batdaches” (male prostitutes), and knights of the Manchette, a common term used for male homosexual gatherings. “The tribades are a visionary nation, incomprehensible, loving pleasure to excess.” The *Histoire* created an imaginary world with sexual mores totally opposite from what could be tolerated on earth.<sup>40</sup>

The possibilities were endless. The discontented found in travel literature a mirror with which to reflect on their world by invoking an imaginary new one, a distant utopia. For example, the *Nouveau Voyage de la terre austral* (1693) said that all the androgynous Australians are born with two sexes inside them, and the word “father” is unknown to them. Hence mothers and children are not subordinated to fathers, and “the great empire that man has usurped over woman, has been rather the effect of an odious tyranny and not a legitimate authority.”<sup>41</sup> When tyranny comes under attack, its gendered definition could be broadened fairly easily to include all male authority figures. In

addition, once the high and mighty can be seen to be libertines, why not invest whole peoples with the power of sexual license? Travel east or west, even to Africa, the pundits said; there love is made freely, without shame.<sup>42</sup>

The essence of humankind, according to the Australians, is liberty. They are also vague about God: “they believe that this incomprehensible being is all there is and they give him all the veneration imaginable.” They never, however, talk about religion. The old Australian guide, *le vieillard philosophe*, then explains that the universe is composed of atoms in motion, nothing more. In the journey to an imagined new world, the old philosopher tells us, in effect, that passage from deism to materialism, thanks to the new science, has become virtually effortless.

At precisely the same moment, an anonymous Englishman journeying to Tartary—at least in his imagination—in 1689 discovered “Death to be nothing else but a Cessation from the Motions of Action and Thought.” The Tartars clearly do not believe in an afterlife. If anyone asks the traveler his religion, he should say that he is a shepherd.<sup>43</sup> The subgenre of utopian travel literature, specifically intended to teach irreligion and open up new vistas of disbelief, originated among countless anonymous authors writing from late in the seventeenth century.

Even in parts of Eastern Europe without an imperial stake in global exploration, imaginary travel opened up rich possibilities. For most Europeans, Tartary was beyond the pale. It began roughly with Russia and went on ever eastward. There was, however, an east that was closer, which Western Europeans both then and now describe as Eastern Europe. In Vienna, Eugene of Savoy stood close to its gateway. By the eighteenth century, this part of Europe had come to be regarded as backward in both literacy and numeracy. This had not always been the case.

The cities of Poland and Lithuania in the sixteenth century possessed wages and a level of prosperity (as measured in the height of people) comparable to that of England. But gradually serfdom was imposed, and by 1700 there existed far less literacy and numeracy than in Western Europe. With literacy rates well below 10 percent, the possibility of creating a vibrant marketplace for ideas such as could be seen in London, Amsterdam, or Paris simply did not exist in these eastern and central areas of Europe.<sup>44</sup> But ideas move. Indeed, it was Protestant Germans who first brought enlightened ideas into Polish territory. That said, the Poles were fully capable of producing their own libertines and atheists. The early Enlightenment can be found in cities from Dublin to Cracow and beyond.<sup>45</sup>

Even the vast dispersal of Armenian traders everywhere in Europe and India did not exempt them from the influence of the Enlightenment. This took the form first of the creation of a periodical Armenian press in Madras. *Azdarar* (*Monitor*) appeared there in 1794 and was soon followed by other periodicals in Venice and Constantinople. Equally important, a discernibly republican line of thought, influenced by the writings of Locke and Montesquieu, surfaced in these texts. The secularization of Armenia was a process that developed largely in the nineteenth century, but it was facilitated by the late eighteenth-century move toward mass literacy and the literature that catered to it.<sup>46</sup>

As we discovered in France and Italy, the reach of censorship had its limits. Even the Spanish could barely keep up with the import and export of forbidden books. By the 1780s, they could be found in Buenos Aires—at least so the Spanish Inquisition believed. On one occasion, it rummaged through five boxes of books being sent from Madrid to Buenos Aires and there found a treasure trove of the forbidden.<sup>47</sup> If the Inquisition could not stop such traffic, then no one was safe.



The certainty of royal and ecclesiastical absolutisms crumbled in the face of the late-century democratic revolutions and the principles they articulated. The Enlightenment made that articulation possible partly through an anonymous, seditious, pornographic, and illicit trade that no eighteenth-century government ever managed to stop. Through it, the mechanical philosophy, and the infinite universe filled with atoms that it postulated, became an avenue to materialism. The peoples of our earth and their oppression demanded explanation, a new language and new theories to explain their situation. Major and minor philosophes rose to the challenge. Rather than embrace inferiority as explanatory, the Scottish philosophers saw stages of human progress; English reformers proclaimed the abolition of slavery, while French philosophes like Rousseau became dreamers of democracy. Not all of these reformers were materialists. Yet none of them invoked divine providence or the hand of God to explain the effects of imperialism, or the nature of monarchical authority, or the equality and human rights demanded now for all the peoples of the world.

By 1700, the Enlightenment had taken shape and came to rest in the urban spaces of Western Europe. An infinity of possible explanations for how society and government should operate, how the excesses of power should be trimmed, if not eliminated, beckoned for anyone gifted at using pen and paper. Men, and the occasional woman, joined the enterprise as critics, satirists, and theorists. Most lacked funding, and the hunt was on to find patrons. Voltaire landed at the Berlin court of Frederick the Great, enjoyed himself, and came eventually to see the king and his army as predatory. The less famous like Picart and Bernard made a decent living as publishers and engravers. Toland acted as a spy for the Whig party and lay on his deathbed in 1722 too poor to pay his doctor. It is nothing short of remarkable that

this small army of the enlightened managed to survive and for the most part did not trim their sails to please the tastes of their patrons. With a newly expanded universe at their disposal, they exploded the boundaries of the acceptable, brought the censors out in full force, and despite persecution and jail time, managed to publish and even die in their beds. In the process, they dismantled one Christian orthodoxy after another. By the end of the century, the deist Thomas Jefferson edited the Bible to root out the fantastic and the irrational.<sup>48</sup> In some circles, atheism had even become fashionable; space had become truly emptied.

John Locke argued in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) that human beings can know only those things that could be sensed: felt, smelled, seen, heard. If space was now empty, what could fill it? Where were the spirits, saints, and demons in whom most Westerners still believed? Where were the nether regions to which souls must depart? The deeply religious Isaac Newton said that space is the “sensorium” of God. In 1715–16, the German philosopher and co-inventor of the calculus, G. Leibniz, replied in a famous correspondence with Newton’s follower, Samuel Clarke, that such a notion of God having a sensorium, an organ of sensation, was absurd.<sup>49</sup> The new science of Galileo and Newton left the issue of the relationship between God and the universe, between spirit and matter, between space and bodies, profoundly unsettled.