

were of limited utility in the next; and it is a testimony to their own resourcefulness that they persisted through a continuing dialogue with their intellectual heritage in adapting that heritage to their shifting purposes.

Through a brief examination of the leading ideas and principal works in the liberal tradition, the jurisprudential tradition, the literature of political economy and improvement, the civic humanist tradition, the literature of the Enlightenment, and the Scottish moral and historical tradition, this booklet seeks to provide an introduction to the main outlines of the intellectual heritage of the Founders of the American republic, as it was used by the founding generation and represented in the collections of the Library Company of Philadelphia, "The Delegates' Library."

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### *The Liberal Tradition*

THE LIBERAL tradition of social and political thought in which John Locke (1632–1704) was the pivotal figure was symbiotically related to the spectacular advances in science and natural philosophy during the seventeenth century. The ongoing encounter with the New World beginning with Columbus's voyages to America during the 1490s, the rapid spread of the new invention of printing, the expanding acquaintance with the classics and the flowering of intellectual life during the sixteenth-century Renaissance, and the spirit of religious inquiry stimulated by the Protestant Reformation in northern Europe had all contributed to a widespread interest in the revival of learning. By the end of the sixteenth century, this interest had resulted in a search for a new philosophy based on experience. One of the most important early results of this search was the development during the early decades of the seventeenth century of an empirical approach to both science and philosophy. The most prominent exponents of the "new" experimental method were Francis Bacon (1561–1626) in England and René Descartes (1596–1650) in France. Bacon's wide-ranging writings were particularly well-known to the learned in eighteenth-century America and well-represented in the collections of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

In the middle decades of the seventeenth century, other leading advocates of the new science—men like Robert Boyle (1627–91) in chemistry and the physical sciences, William Harvey (1578–1657) in medicine, and John Ray (1627–1705) in natural history and geology took an even more rigorous approach to their studies. Their