

1774) and *Theory of Taxation* (n.p., 1760) by Victor Riquetti, Marquis de Mirabeau (1715–89); utilitarian writings such as *De l'Esprit, or, Essays on the Mind, and Its Several Faculties** (Paris, 1758) and *A Treatise on Man** (Paris, 1772) by Claude Adrien Helvetius (1715–71); early materialist works like *The System of Nature* (London, 1770) by Paul Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723–89); celebrations of the civic virtue of the ancients such as *Observations on the Romans** (Paris, 1740), and *Observations on the Government and Laws of the United States* (Amsterdam, 1784) by Abbé Gabriel Bonnet de Mably (1709–85); the anti-slavery *Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies** (Amsterdam, 1770) by Abbé Guillaume Thomas François Raynal (1713–96); the first works of the later radical Enlightenment such as *Life of M. Turgot** (Paris, 1786) by Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743–94) and *Travels Through Syria and Egypt** (Paris, 1787) by Constantin Volney (1757–1820); the substantial tracts by the Swiss natural-law theorists Burlamaqui and Vattel mentioned in Chapter 2; the sympathetic discussion of the workings of the English political system by the Swiss political analyst Jean Louis De Lolme (1740–1805), in *The Constitution of England** (Amsterdam, 1771); and the poignant advocacy of the reform of criminal law by the Milanese Cesare Beccaria (1738–94), in *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments** (Livorno, 1764).

Except for the writings of Raynal, Burlamaqui, Vattel, and Beccaria, these works, though present in a few American libraries, were neither known, readily accessible, nor especially influential in America before the 1790s. But this was not true of the work of three other eighteenth-century French philosophes. Almost all educated Americans were well-acquainted with at least some of the voluminous writings of the philosophical skeptic François Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694–1778) and the searching tracts of the iconoclastic Genevan Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78). Among the most popular of Voltaire's works in America were his *Letters on the English Nation** (London, 1733), his *Philosophical Dictionary** (Geneva, 1764), his collected *Works** (Paris, 1751), and, among his many histories, his *History of Charles II** (Basle, 1731), *Age of Louis XIV** (Berlin, 1751), and *General History and State of Europe** (Geneva, 1756). All of Rousseau's major works could be found in American libraries: *A Discourse upon the Origin and Foundations of the Inequality of Mankind** (Amsterdam, 1755), *Heloise** (Paris, 1761), *A Treatise on the Social Compact* (Amsterdam, 1762), *Emile and Sophia; Or a New System of Education** (Amsterdam, 1762), and *Confessions** (Geneva, 1782). Though their works seem to

have been more widely read than those of most other Continental philosophes, neither Voltaire nor Rousseau appear for most leading Americans to have spoken directly to American problems during the Revolutionary era, albeit the popularity of Rousseau increased substantially after 1790. Voltaire's skepticism had little appeal for a people who had no Old Regime that required dismantling, while Rousseau's celebration of primitive simplicity was uncongenial for societies that throughout their histories had been trying desperately to escape from exactly that condition.

The one writer who did speak directly to American problems was the cautious philosophe Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron Montesquieu (1689–1755), whose earlier *Persian Letters** (Paris, 1721), and *Reflections on the Causes of the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire** (Paris, 1734) were read by Americans, and whose massive analysis of ancient and modern political systems, *The Spirit of the Laws** (Paris, 1748), which appeared in English in 1750, was perhaps the single most important work of political analysis for Americans of the Revolutionary generation. Of the major philosophical and political writings of the time, only Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was more widely available in American libraries, and no work, not even Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, was cited more frequently and more consistently in American polemical literature from the 1760s through the 1780s. Widely regarded as the best available authority on constitutional design, *The Spirit of the Laws* has correctly been described by one scholar as the American "textbook on republican government."

To an important extent, Montesquieu worked within the civic humanist tradition. A great admirer of the ancients, he has been described as the "chief . . . civic moralist" of the eighteenth century. For him, political virtue, defined as an equality of subjection to the laws of the polis and a common devotion of citizens to the public good, was the guiding principle of republics, which Montesquieu thought possible only in relatively small and economically homogeneous political societies in which a mutual surveillance among citizens could deflect private passion into a concern for public happiness. But Montesquieu departed from the civic humanist tradition by recognizing that civic virtue, unnatural and difficult to achieve even in the best of circumstances, was not an appropriate goal for complex modern commercial nations. Indeed, he effectively subscribed to the liberal tradition in his perception that middle-class avarice and the values of hard work, frugality, independence, and personal liberty