Introduction

In framing our original plan of this work, we adopted a number of guidelines which formed our prospectus for the contributors and which, by and large, still lend direction to and map the limits of this volume. We were determined in the space available to provide as comprehensive a treatment as possible of eighteenth-century political thought in the diverse historical contexts of the period, instead of a series of essays on our subject's acknowledged masters. We wished to give due weight to the polemical character of eighteenth-century disputations and to the circumstances surrounding the composition of the works at issue, rather than to subsume their differences of principle or perspective in separate chapters manifesting the internal logic of each author's career. We accordingly aimed for a largely thematic framework in preference to an interconnected collection of intellectual biographies. In addition to focusing on the seminal writings of the vanguard of the eighteenth-century's republic of letters, we also wished to address the texts of relatively minor figures who often couched their contributions to both national and international debates in locally specific contexts and idioms. We sought to survey not only the towering treatises of the age of Enlightenment but also a large number of its disparate *pièces fugitives*, in part because we thought it necessary to fill in the valleys from which the peaks arose, but more generally because, in our judgement, some of the most centrally recurrent topics of eighteenth-century political thought were pursued in works that were perhaps of greater historical than philosophical significance.

Our temporal limits were of course determined by the structure of the series as a whole, but the logic which required that we begin around 1700 and end around 1800 seemed internally compelling as well as appropriate to the broader narrative shaped by the volumes before and after this one. *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700* closes with Locke but does not address the great issues of toleration which his writings highlighted around the turn of the eighteenth century and thereby provided one of the principal mainsprings of the age of Enlightenment embraced

by this work. If we have not sought here to retrace the first appearance of such terms as 'The Enlightenment', 'The Scottish Enlightenment', 'The Counter-Enlightenment', or 'The Enlightenment Project' (in English dating from the late nineteenth century, the early twentieth century, the late 1950s, and the early 1980s, respectively), our reasoning is that these terms need to be situated even more in the post-Enlightenment philosophical and political contexts which gave rise to them than with reference to the ideological currents they were introduced to define. The periodisation of the age of Enlightenment, particularly with respect to its initial phase, in so far as that epoch of European intellectual history can be regarded as marking the advent of modernity, has itself been a subject of much scholarly debate. Paul Hazard, for instance, in his *Crise de la conscience européenne* (The Crisis of the European Mind) of 1935, dated its origins from a thirty-year span around 1680, and Michel Foucault, in *Les mots et les choses* (The Order of Things) of 1966, on the other hand, concentrated instead upon an interval of similarly rapid epistemic change beginning 100 years later. Since this volume addresses themes in eighteenth-century political thought and not the period's later historiography, scholarly differences of interpretation that turn around or reflect different chronologies are beyond our scope.

It in fact suits our purpose well that in other quarters there should be disagreements about the origins, nature, and limits of the Enlightenment, since our perspective of eighteenth-century political doctrines lies comfortably within the orbits of such competing claims as those of Hazard and Foucault. It also accords with the perception of a number of Enlightenment thinkers themselves to the effect that their age was launched around the time between the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and the death of Louis XIV in 1715, drawing inspiration in that period above all from Newtonian science and Lockean epistemology, as well as ideas of toleration derived not only from Locke but also from Bayle. Ernst Cassirer adopted roughly the same chronological perspective in his *Philosophie der Aufklärung* (The Philosophy of the Enlightenment) of 1932, albeit on more philosophical foundations, in distinguishing the eighteenth century's 'systematic spirit' from the seventeenth century's 'spirit of system', a contrast he drew directly from d'Alembert, who first made this claim in his *Discours préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie* of 1751.

Our closing this volume with the rise of Napoleon in the mid- to late 1790s rather than with the demise, by the early 1780s (at least in France), of most of the major *philosophes* is, we believe, justly warranted by the parallel chronologies of the eighteenth-century's intellectual and political histories.

The French Revolution of 1789, even more than the American Revolution of 1776, was perceived by both contemporary advocates and critics as a realisation or practical culmination of Enlightenment ideals, or, alternatively, as a descent into political chaos that the *philosophes* had foreseen and sought to avert. To have ignored the French Revolution would have been tantamount to our denying the immediate influence and proximate political impact of much late Enlightenment thought, as well to our disengaging from our subject those political thinkers of this period for whom the Terror seemed to have been generated by dangerous currents of eighteenth-century philosophy. A conception of the unity of theory and practice may be said to lie at the heart of many Enlightenment programmes of political or constitutional reform, but it is also with regard to that intellectual movement's bearing on the eighteenth century's two great revolutions that the realisation of this pragmatic principle has often been identified as the Enlightenment's chief philosophical objective.

The late 1790s was no doubt a period of pivotal significance in both closing a debate about the Enlightenment's influence on the Revolution and inaugurating fresh perspectives on political thought that would come to prevail not only in Restoration France but throughout Europe in the early nineteenth century. We seek in this work to address that closure but not to map the new paths that arose from it. We thus include Burke but not de Maistre, Smith but not Malthus, Kant but not Hegel. We consider concepts of both ancient and modern liberty in the philosophies of Montesquieu, Hume, Rousseau, Smith, and Ferguson, but exclude the foundations of liberalism in the doctrines of Constant and Mme de Staël. We address Bentham's seminal utilitarian works but not his subsequent constitutional theories. In concluding this volume with the concept of 'ideology' in the late 1790s we mean both to bring the history of eighteenth-century political thought to its chronological term and to lay a bridge to the series' next volume.

Framed by an English Revolution on the one side and a French Revolution on the other, with an American Revolution between them, the doctrinal battles that form the hundred years' war of the period's intellectuals, publicists, and even some of its heads of state, were waged around a great variety of issues. As presented here across several chapters we conceive one of this work's central themes to be the interpenetration of political and religious ideas in both theory and practice, as witnessed not only in the progressive disengagement of secular from sacred authority throughout the eighteenth century, but also in appraisals of the theological and

political ambitions of both the papacy and different Protestant churches. These debates turned, for instance, around the claims of Jacobitism in England, ultramontanism and Gallicanism in France, Josephinism in Austria, and the tensions between priestcraft, deism, and scepticism that marked numerous controversies throughout much of Europe in this period.

The imputed conjunction of knowledge with power, or *savoir* with *pouvoir*, in the age of Enlightenment, often the subject of critiques of the period which trace its protagonists' political ambitions to their advocacy of science, comprises an equally major theme of this volume. It is examined here in a variety of contexts, including the promotion of ideas of progress or even eschatological optimism that inclined many progressive thinkers of the period to regard religious faith and orthodox beliefs as tantamount to barbarism, to the diffusion of dictionaries and newspapers that enabled readers in metropolitan centres to form themselves into new political classes, to the attempts of writers, kings, and queens to realise Plato's ancient ambition of promoting genuinely philosophical kingship, by the late eighteenth century already defined as 'enlightened despotism' by certain figures sympathetic to that doctrine's objectives.

A number of chapters address themes that turn around the political economy of the period, embracing both national and international debates on property, citizenship, commerce, and luxury, and the competing claims of virtue and wealth, as well as the development of physiocracy in France, cameralism in Germany and Austria, and the association of economics with moral philosophy that in Scotland was to form the nexus of the most advanced of all the human sciences of this period. Other chapters, including those that address a German tradition of natural jurisprudence, conceptions of the social contract and the common law of England, concentrate instead upon juristic themes, while still others are focused upon national arguments about political parties, notions of liberty, and ideals of patriotic rule, or on internationalist perspectives and philosophies of history which in the eighteenth century informed both doctrines of naturalism and the comparative study of societies. If we have not sought to engage with modern philosophers and contemporary social theorists about the central tenets and tendencies of the age of Enlightenment as a whole, we hope that attentive readers of this volume who have been drawn by other commentators to reflect on the eighteenth-century's putative public spheres, metanarratives, romantic reaction to rationalism, roots of totalitarian democracy, or passage from classicism to modernity, will here find such evidence as may enable them to navigate through such thickets of interpretation.

In so far as they inform so much of the political thought of the period as a whole, several of the themes addressed in this work, especially with regard to jurisprudence as well as to theology and economics when those subjects have manifest political ramifications, are traced across long spans and with reference to a wide range of thinkers, thereby necessitating brisker treatments of individual works than chapters which provide commentaries on national debates or traditions, or, as with respect to the American and French Revolutions, which deal with texts produced in highly concentrated periods of political ferment. In attempting to situate eighteenth-century political tracts and arguments within the specific contexts that occasioned them, we may be thought to have adopted a methodology appropriate to the *Cambridge History of Political Thought* as a whole, but that would be to exaggerate both the depth of our ambition and the extent of our control over the various chapters we commissioned. More strictly biographical formats for each chapter have been adopted by the editors of other volumes in this series, and, aside from introducing obvious chronological divisions, no attempt has been made to establish a consistent format throughout the collection. Not least because eighteenth-century thinkers often envisaged their political writings as contributions to wider subjects scarcely circumscribed by such disciplinary boundaries as were to arise after the age of Enlightenment, we have tried to be undogmatic about defining the meaning of political thought and therefore the range and boundaries of our work, even while acknowledging that the thematic divisions we have preferred cannot but exclude other perspectives.

The limitations of our approach have occasionally and even increasingly seemed to us just marginally less compelling than its merits. Particularly with reference to the pre-eminent thinkers of the eighteenth century, we recognise that in emphasising specificity and context we have been obliged to leave less scope for biographical continuity and philosophical coherence than some scholars might have wished, and we have attempted to meet such concerns as best we could by way of subdivisions of each chapter which often turn around the careers of separate authors and, even more, in our biographical appendix. If the length of our entries in that appendix appears to be inversely correlated with the historical significance of their subjects, that is just because we rely upon (and direct our readers' attention to) other sources that provide fuller biographical treatments of the most major figures than are appropriate or possible here.

Neither have we managed or even sought to impose our design of this work upon its separate authors, many of whom adopted an alternative view

of their task and each of whom interpreted his or her assigned brief independently of the others. In the spirit of the eighteenth century's republic of letters we solicited contributions from experts of different generations with diverse backgrounds based in several countries in both Europe and North America. In a few instances we were confronted by the difficulty of integrating a contributor's style, choice of topics or interpretation of texts even within the loosely designed framework we provided, and in order to produce this work at all we accordingly came, reluctantly, to feel obliged to abandon our original hope that its separate compositions might appear to have been drafted seamlessly by an invisible hand. Much effort has nonetheless been devoted to achieving that effect, so far as it has been in our power, at least in order to maintain some consistency of style and balance, as well as to fill in gaps and strike out overlaps where they arose.

I

The *ancien régime* and its critics

I
The spirit of nations

SYLVANA TOMASELLI

1 Lessons from the Franks and the Greeks

Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des lois*[1] (The Spirit of the Laws, 1748) stands among the most intellectually challenging and inspired contributions to political theory in the eighteenth century. The scope of the book, its sustained reflection, its impact on social and political debates throughout Europe, as well as its enduring influence make it an exceptional work. As its subtitle indicates, it purports to examine the relation laws must have to the specific constitution, civil society, and physical circumstances of the country in which they are being made or enforced. To apprehend the spirit of a nation's laws is thus to understand the relationship which pertains between a number of social, political, and material factors peculiar to that nation. What the remainder of the subtitle further suggests, and the body of the text makes explicit, is that the knowledge which such an examination both requires and produces is historical in nature. In linking history and law and making both central to political theory Montesquieu, together with the Scottish school of political economy, which he profoundly influenced, set the tone and form of modern social and political thought. He paved the way leading to Hegel, who recognised the true nature of his genius better than most of his admirers (Hegel 1991, pp. 29, 283, 310–11; 1999, p. 175; see also Carrithers 2001a).

The importance of history to the art of the legislator had long been recognised by the beginning of the eighteenth century (see especially Pocock 1999–2003). Unsurprisingly, the Historiographer Royal, Voltaire, wholeheartedly endorsed it; but, as will be shown below, Voltaire's reading of

1 Its full title is *De l'esprit des lois ou du rapport que les lois doivent avoir avec la constitution de chaque gouvernement, les moeurs, le climat, la religion, le commerce, etc. A quoi l'auteur a ajouté des recherches nouvelles sur les lois romaines touchant les successions, sur les lois françaises et sur les lois féodales*, which translates as *On the Spirit of Laws or on the Relation which Laws Ought to Bear to the Constitution of each Government, Mores, Climate, Religion, Commerce, etc. to which the Author Has Added New Research on Roman Law relating to Successions, French Laws, and Feudal Laws*.

history differed markedly from that of Montesquieu. Along with lesser-known political writers, however, both he and Montesquieu participated in an already established political debate about France's political identity in which history played a crucial role, not least since Bodin's *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (Method for Learning History Easily, 1566), a work which greatly affected the demarcation between secular and ecclesiastical history. It is this protracted political argument about France's true nature that provides the context for Montesquieu's political reflections as well as those of many of his contemporaries. The power struggles involving the crown and, at various times, all or parts of the clergy, the aristocracy, and the magistracy had engendered a large body of literature, ranging from political testaments, such as that of Richelieu, published in 1688, and memoirs from the leading protagonists of the Fronde, such as those of the Cardinal de Retz, which appeared in 1717, to substantive political treatises addressed to heirs to the throne. Amongst those who drew on history for the latter purpose was Bossuet in his *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'écriture sainte* (Politics Drawn from the Words of Scripture, 1679) which, together with his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681), sought to present the then Dauphin, Louis XIV's heir apparent, with all that could be gleaned from history, sacred and profane, that was necessary 'to wise and perfect government' (see Riley 1990, pp. xiii–lxviii). Not all political works made systematic use of history, but they were all informed by it to some degree by the turn of the century, and no-one in the intellectual world could be unaware of its deployment.

An instance of a book which appealed to Greek mythology, rather than history sacred or profane, was the exceedingly widely read and highly influential *Les Aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse* (1699), which Fénelon wrote for the moral edification of Louis XIV's grandson, the duc de Bourgogne. Fénelon was far less accepting of the mores of his age than many of his contemporaries, and was highly critical of Louis XIV's conception of the aim of government and the nature of glory on earth. It was Fénelon's hope, therefore, that, once on the throne, his pupil, the young prince, would prove to be the antithesis of his grandfather, the Sun King Louis XIV; that is, that he would be a peaceful, frugal, and generally self-denying monarch, and that far from seeking to be involved at every level of the kingdom's administration, he would interfere as little as possible with, and hence delegate most of, France's governance (Fénelon 1994, p. 299) – a theme which echoed through some eighteenth-century political works in contrast to calls

for a *dirigiste* approach to reform.[2] Through Mentor's teachings, Telemachus is prepared to surpass his father Ulysses, and the predominant lesson, one that is consonant with Fénelon's quietist belief that Christians must strive to love God for no other reason than that he is God, and hence must love God in a entirely disinterested manner, is that of selflessness (Keohane 1980, pp. 341–3; Riley 1994, pp. xxv–xxviii). Telemachus must learn to rule not for himself, but for the good of the people. He is encouraged in particular to forsake luxury and not to think of glory in terms of magnificence. He is not to build superb buildings, nor engage in wars of aggrandisement, but leave behind him a contented, industrious, and virtuous people who, whilst welcoming to merchants and engaged in trade, are primarily agrarian and live a simple life uncorrupted by luxury (Fénelon 1994, pp. 294–301). Fénelon's unequivocal disapproval of luxury, which he linked to women and their presence at court, which they corrupted, runs throughout his political writings.[3] In his *Examen de conscience pour un roi* (1734) Fénelon reminded his royal charge of the lack of ostentation of his ancestors' abodes before the reign of Francis I, at which time women began to appear at court, and praised St Louis in particular for the modesty of his house and the economy with which it was run (Fénelon 1747a, pp. 14–20). Next to luxury, it was war that concerned Fénelon most, and the *Examen* stresses the iniquity of wars and argues that it is best for the nation that its king seeks to maintain a position of equality with the rest of European countries so as to maintain a peaceful equilibrium. This was also the subject of his remonstrance to Louis XIV in a letter first published by d'Alembert in 1787, in the latter's *Histoire des membres de l'Académie française* (Fénelon 1964, pp. 299–309). For Fénelon all wars were civil wars. Humanity was a single society and all wars within it the greatest evil, for he argued that one's obligation to mankind as a whole was always greater than what was owed to one's particular country (Fénelon 1810, p. 62). Aside from the negative duty of desisting from the self-indulgence of opulence and warring, Fénelon mentioned also a positive one. He deemed it incumbent on princes to study the true form of the government of their kingdom. He thought it their God-given duty to study natural law, the laws of nations, as well as the fundamental laws and customs of their particular nations. This entailed knowing the way the kingdom had

2 For an account of Fénelon's influence and the plans which he, together with the dukes of Beauvillier and Chevreuse, hoped to put to the prince once he was king, the *Plans de gouvernement* or *Tables de chaulnes*, see Keohane 1980, pp. 343–6.

3 On luxury, see ch. 13 below.