Early Modern Europe

Issues and Interpretations

EDITED BY
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EARLY MODERN EUROPE
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Historiographical debates in progress since the 1960s have fundamentally redefined early modern Europe. New questions, such as the role of women in society or the nature of the relationship between Europeans and non-Europeans, drive the work of many contemporary scholars. Old questions, such as religion and politics or state-building, receive new formulations. This reader seeks to blend the new and the old, to give students a taste of the elaborate banquet offered by today’s scholarship on early modern Europe.

The editors have chosen to divide the book into six parts: (1) evolving early modern identities; (2) changes in religion and cultural life; (3) the revolution of the mind; (4) the roles of women in early modern society; (5) the rise of the modern state system; and (6) research paradigms, old and new. These categories are naturally somewhat arbitrary; in each case, one can see close connections between topics treated in a given category (religious dissent) and those treated in another (colonialism). The part introductions will deliberately stress these connections.

We begin with the proposition that we need to expand the traditional boundaries of “Europe,” as it is reconstructed by most textbooks and collections. We have consciously chosen to include material on the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as well as on a broad range of other states. Chronologically, we begin in the sixteenth century and end, with one exception, in the middle of the eighteenth. As Eugene Rice has suggested, the great changes of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries – the invention of printing, the Renaissance, the integration of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, the Reformation – laid the “foundation of early modern Europe.” Europe entered a new era in the second half of the eighteenth century, both in terms of the political revolutions in the Atlantic World and the dramatic economic and social changes created by the early stages of modern capitalism.

Part I: Evolving Early Modern Identities

Early modern Europeans had to redefine themselves in every aspect of their humanity. Explorers proved to Europeans the existence of vast, heavily populated continents, hitherto unknown
to them. Humanists undermined the accepted meaning of fundamental texts and writers by subjecting the sources of classical times and of early Christianity to rigorous, scholarly analysis. Scientists would soon revise people’s view of the heavens, and of Earth’s place in the universe, to say nothing of the laws of motion and the understanding of the human body itself. Religious reformers destroyed the seemingly immemorial unity of the European Christian community. Virtually no important institution or fundamental belief of the European world of 1450 survived intact in 1650.

Much recent scholarship has dealt with the complex construction of identities necessitated by the enormous changes in early modern European life. We have defined broadly questions of identity, choosing selections, like that of Karin Friedrich, that undermine old assumptions about “national” identity, and others, such as that of Anthony Pagden, that place “Europeans” within a global context.

**Part II: Changes in Religion and Cultural Life**

The Reformation disrupted European societies in a way so fundamental, so central to human existence that its passions still astound us. Yet passions with roots in ethnic (the Balkans or Rwanda), religious (Algeria, France, Ireland, Kashmir, or the United States) or racial differences cause, or deepen, many modern conflicts. In the sixteenth century, as now, passions alone do not lie behind the terrible deeds; they become intertwined with more traditional personal and political motives: territorial ambitions, realpolitik, and simple human greed.

The intrusion of schism into a world so militantly conscious of its religious unity, indeed, into a society that defined religion largely in terms of communal unity, led to frenzied violence all over Europe. Western Europe’s Atlantic encounter, and closer contact with Africa and Asia, often reinforced the old Crusading impulses, which encouraged violence in the conquest of the Amerindian empires. Bernal Díaz, companion of Cortez, repeatedly compared the conquistadores to the brave knights of the Reconquista of Spain from the Muslims and even to Charlemagne’s Franks. The ongoing struggle with the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean encouraged similar views; later, slave traders would use the Christian “just war” theory to excuse their foul commerce.

Many early modern Europeans could not imagine a world of religious diversity, which meant their kingdom/state had to be a Christian kingdom on earth. The Burgundian town deputies to the Estates General of France, meeting in 1560, expressed the near-universal opinion of their day: “this kingdom, which from time immemorial has been Christian, finds itself divided into several sects . . . Such division is the cause of subversion and mutation of kingdoms and the depopulation of all states.”

Our selections provide some sense of the variety and depth of these changes, ranging from Denis Crouzet’s contribution about religious processions in northern France in 1583, to David Sabean’s anthropological dissection of the ritual burial of a live bull in late eighteenth-century Rhineland Germany.

**Part III: The Revolution of the Mind**

During the long night of plague and war that lasted from the middle of the fourteenth century until the middle of the fifteenth, the cold plains of northern Europe felt the first warm winds of intellectual and moral change from Renaissance Italy. Many of those changes had already begun
in medieval times, but Italian Humanism gave them new impetus. Areas such as Flanders absorbed the Italian artistic and cultural revolution in the early fifteenth century and then served, in their turn, as centers of diffusion. The spread of printing from Rhineland Germany into other parts of Europe after 1450/60 further accelerated the spread of new cultural norms. The Italian wars accelerated the acceptance of Renaissance ideas by the elites who participated in them, whether from France or the far-flung realms of Charles V. European aristocracy turned openly to Italian models of dress, of comportment, and of taste. Classical ideas fundamentally modified European political thought and literature, indeed all cultural life.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the “Scientific Revolution” and the Enlightenment drove European societies in fundamentally new directions. Taken together, the Renaissance, “Scientific Revolution,” and Enlightenment provided the foundations for modern intellectual life. Modern scholarship has gone beyond the traditional focus on changes among elites, seeking to reconstruct the world of mentalités (collective states of mind) of earlier times.

The study of mentalités began with the work of scholars such as Lucien Febvre, in the 1930s and 1940s, so we have included a selection from his work to give some idea of how the field has evolved. Recent scholarship, like the fascinating research of Kathleen Wellman on how seventeenth-century French intellectuals understood the science of their time, has called into question the old paradigm of the “Scientific Revolution” associated with scholars from the 1950s, like Herbert Butterfield. This new work demonstrates that the teleological view of the reception of “scientific” ideas does not make much sense. In Part VI, the selection from Patricia Seed shows the uses to which this new scientific data could be put, outside of the realm of science itself.

**Part IV: The Roles of Women in Early Modern Society**

Religious schism provided a critical element in the evolution of new roles for women in early modern society. Some men, like the French Protestant historian Agrippa d’Aubigné, who insisted his daughters know Latin and praised learned women to them (yet warned them against the dangers of being learned women), or the great poet Pierre de Ronsard, who placed “honor, virtue, grace, and knowledge” before “beauty” among his true love’s qualities, respected and defended individual women. Yet, whether we look at legal ordinances on marriage, at official harangues about the family and the state, at the treatises of Jean Bodin or Robert Filmer, or at guild rules, every empirical study of a group of women – seamstresses, actresses, linen merchants, litigants – has found that women seized the day and empowered themselves between 1680 and 1780. In France, more women lived on their own, headed taxable households, and ran businesses; women even created new professions, like marchande de mode (fashion merchant), that took advantage of the burgeoning market economy. Moreover, every study of that economy, be it in England, the Netherlands, or Italy, argues that women, not men, were the buyers driving the revolution in consumption.
Early modern European states consistently stressed the special authority of fathers at precisely the moment when they stressed the special authority of the monarch. The king would have supreme authority in his kingdom; the father would have supreme authority in his family. Both authorities came from, and were modeled on, the supreme authority of God the Father. Again and again, Europeans referred to the three fathers: God the Father; the king, father of his people; the father of the family.

Male elites had to confront the possibility that one of the cornerstones of their society, the patriarchal family, had to be reformulated. The rising tide of individualism created a new threat to patriarchal society: the individual woman. Threatened in this way, men responded with a ferocious legal assault on women.

Many women, both Protestant and Catholic, used the newly fluid religious situation to create positions of power for themselves. Moreover, the central role of mothers in providing the first stages of moral education for their children gave women a particularly important new role in the formation of future generations. This part examines the “woman question” as it touched on various aspects of European society, from the legal activism of Norman women to the cultural dynamism of Jewish salonnières in late eighteenth-century Berlin. Many of the articles in other parts, such as that by Clare Crowston, illustrate the wider dimension of women’s lives in early modern Europe. Women responded to the male assault with a renewed, and often successful offensive of their own.

**Part V: The Rise of the Modern State System**

The disorder of early modern times and the rapid growth of the royal governments called for a new political philosophy. Practical debates about lawmaking, taxation, and religion had profound theoretical consequences. The philosophic debates focused on law-making authority, turning that authority into the entity we know as sovereignty. In creating the idea of unified, inalienable sovereignty, and in juxtaposing that creation with the rise of a larger, more powerful government, the people of late sixteenth-century Europe left to the modern world one of its defining intellectual and practical characteristics: the sovereign state.

The older scholarship posited stark differences among European states, but modern researchers, like John Brewer, have found far more in common among states like England and France than earlier historians, often blinded by nationalist prejudice, had done. Thomas Kaiser’s article shows how debates in eighteenth-century France helped create an image not only of the Ottoman Empire, and of “Asia,” but of the French monarchy. As Felix Gilbert suggests, in one of our earliest selections, modern debates about the nature of political society owe much to the great writers of Renaissance Florence, such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Their writings profoundly influenced political thinkers throughout the European world.

**Part VI: Research Paradigms, Old and New**

Where do historians get their ideas for research? We can easily look back and see the intellectual roots of much historical scholarship in the ideas of the prominent thinkers of earlier times, above all the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sociologists like Weber and Durkheim, philosophers like Hegel and Nietzsche, and political economists like Ricardo and Marx have inspired many modern historians. The great nineteenth-century historians, like Acton, Frijn, Ranke,
Solov’ev, and Michelet, created frameworks, such as chronological periodization, that still organize most historical writing. Recent historians, such as Natalie Zemon Davis, or sociologists, like Norbert Elias, have set forth broad theories that two or three generations of historians have now tested. Alfred Crosby brought the study of the environment into the consciousness of historians in a new way, lighting the fuse for the explosion of scholarship in environmental history in the 1990s.

Today’s scholarship reflects the influence of these giants, but determining the direction of the next generation of research is more of a guessing game. In the selections from Lieberman, Pomeranz, and Seed we have opted for two major trends: (1) the progressive expansion of the frame of reference for “Europe,” which we believe historians will view less and less as an isolated entity, and more as an integral part of a global process; and (2) the fundamental rejection of confining intellectual constructs, such as “Scientific Revolution.” Scientists themselves have radically altered their view of “science,” and historians like Seed or Wellman (Part III) are following suit.

The Portuguese voyages around Africa to Asia revolutionized world trade, making Europeans part of a global economy. The “voyages of European discovery” fundamentally altered European worldviews, a process already underway by means of Humanism and soon to be expanded by the religious and scientific revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Historians, we believe, will soon begin to rethink categories like the Reformation, placing the contest between Catholics and Protestants into a global rather than a purely European context. The people living in the sixteenth century, especially the Protestants of northwestern Europe, viewed it so: they wrote constantly of their fears of a globalizing Catholicism overwhelming the Protestant redoubt along the North Sea. Historians of state development will take cues from scholars like Lieberman (a specialist on Asia) and begin to consider the changes in the European state system within a Eurasian, not simply European, context. Much like the people whom they study, they will find New Worlds to discover.

NOTE

1 AD Côte d’Or, C 3469, Third Estate cahiers for the Estate General of 1560, deputies of the duchy of Burgundy, meeting in Dijon, November 1560.
Part I

Evolving Early Modern Identities
Who are we? Early modern Europeans had many answers to that question, as well as to its more modern variant, who am I? The question always has multiple spatial dimensions, from the cottage next door, to the village down the road, to the Earth itself. An individual’s relationship to the universe takes in both the spatial and temporal dimensions, and affects attitudes toward those separated from us by time, like the dead. Early modern Europeans included the dead within their community, as the location of their cemeteries – in the center of the village – makes manifest, just as they lived by laws that protected the future members of the group (above all the family), in matters such as inheritance.

The comforting cocoon of a world and a universe with known limits, of rural religious uniformity, suddenly burst between 1450 and 1550. Everything that been known and certain came undone: truth became falsehood, dream became reality. Little wonder that Thomas More invented Western Europe’s first *Utopia* (1516) since classical times. The world took on a new shape, both literally and figuratively. At the start of the voyages of exploration, a book like *John Mandeville’s Travels* could serve as a guide to Christopher Columbus on his trip into the Atlantic; by the middle of the sixteenth century, Mandeville’s *Travels* had become a book of fables, not one of geography. Nor did the heavens remain in place: Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and others removed the Earth from the center of the universe and, in so doing, redefined humankind’s place in the natural order. Moreover, the European invention of printing in the 1440s (in Mainz) enabled information about the “New World” to spread to elites, who gobbled up travelers’ accounts of their voyages. Scientific discoveries often spread more slowly, as Kathleen Wellman’s essay (Part II) illustrates, but few genuinely literate people in eighteenth-century Europe were unfamiliar with the heliocentric view of the solar system.

Defining oneself in the world created by Columbus and da Gama, in the universe discovered by Galileo and Newton, in the fractured Christianity of Luther, Calvin, and the Council of Trent, could not have been easy. Europeans usually began their self-definition with a group, often their family. Individual self-definition became more pronounced in Europe between 1450 and 1800, a process that began in some ways with elites and in others with the lower classes, spreading from one to the other during the eighteenth century. In contemporary Western society individualism
– the belief in the supreme status of the individual – has replaced systems of belief, ubiquitous in early modern Europe as they are in many less-developed countries today, that assume the primacy of the group. Modern economists have pointed out that this ideological shift parallels an economic one, from family or household as the basic economic unit of production to the individual as that unit.

Most early modern Europeans lived on a group enterprise: a farm. In large measure because survival depended on the group, individuality had a relatively limited range of expression. People at all ranks of society viewed decisions we today would take to be individual, such as marriage, as primarily group choices. The dramatic shift in attitudes toward the marriage decision took place first with the lower classes; change moved from the bottom up. In the late sixteenth century, French couples seeking Church dispensation from the rules on consanguinity invoked the wishes of the two families, the suitable station of the prospective partners, and the economic viability of the proposed household in their requests. By the middle of the eighteenth century, such couples cited their mutual love and respect as the justification for the marriage. In England, as Alan Macfarlane points out (Part IV), individuals below the level of the elite often made individual marriage choices as early as the fourteenth century. Moreover, Chaucer’s “Franklin’s Tale” offers clear evidence that an ideology of equality within marriage already had powerful champions by the 1380s. Even allowing for greater individuality and individual choice than traditional historiography would suggest, however, the group remained paramount in early modern societies.

Early modern political theorists like Jean Bodin, writing in 1576, took rulership to mean the government of “several households”; those households, not individuals, formed the basis of civil society. Conversely, the fundamental unit of political (civic) society, of the commonwealth (res publica), was an individual: the citizen. The nobility, above all, had a strong sense of this dual identity: they had a profound sense of attachment to a family, and of their duties to ancestors and descendants alike. In the seventeenth century, many aristocratic families hired writers to produce a history of their family, and throughout Europe princes conducted “reforms” of the nobility, in theory to cleanse it of “dirty” commoners who had illegally usurped titles and noble privileges. Yet nobles also had a clear sense of themselves as individuals, and demanded recognition of their individuality. They resisted more strongly than any other group the efforts by central governments to treat everyone the same. Where our contemporary individualism, by definition, is intertwined with egalitarianism – we are all equal, so we all have the right to be treated as an individual; early modern nobles viewed indiscriminate egalitarianism as the greatest threat to real individuality.

By the late seventeenth or eighteenth century, writers such as John Locke (Second Treatise of Government, 1681) or Jean-Jacques Rousseau (The Social Contract, 1762) had accepted the radical idea of Thomas Hobbes (Leviathan, 1651) that individuals created political society by means of a contract. By individuals, these writers meant men. Hobbes bluntly stated that women lacked political rights not because men “were the more excellent sex,” but because men had established the commonwealths and had deliberately disenfranchised females to enhance male power. Moreover, writers such as Locke really meant men of property: “the purpose of society is the preservation of property,” by which he meant “lives, liberties, and estates.”

The dividing line between the men of property and those without had a distinct moral over-tone. In many Italian cities, like Siena, the town council was chosen exclusively from the buoni uomini, that is, the men of property: the good men (hommes de bien) were the men who had goods (biens). In Spain, the sixteenth-century picaresque novel Lazarillo de Tormes (1554) carries ironic admonishments to its hero to associate with los buenos, those both wealthy and good. The Calvinist doctrine of the elect, which came to suggest that worldly success was the outward
manifestation of God’s blessing, was thus not a radical shift in ideology, as scholars following the ideas of Max Weber have argued, but the restatement of the old idea that the men of property held a virtual monopoly on virtue. Christ might have said that the poor were “blessed in spirit,” and the rich may have sought out the poor for ritualized prayer (hiring poor people to mourn at their funerals, for example), but in day-to-day life, European urban elites, Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic alike, associated solid prosperity with moral rectitude.

The group–individual dichotomy had profound implications for identity, and for interpersonal relationships. The composition of a household, for example, defined the legal identity of women. The household had a legal identity, which could only be assumed by its head; logically, to royal apologists, the body politic, composed of those households, also could have only one head: the king. Everywhere, law made the adult man the head of the household, so all living under his authority had a restricted legal identity. If he died, however, and no legally adult male could take his place, then the adult woman became the legal personification of the household. Widows headed at least ten percent of European households in 1600; women headed perhaps twenty percent of them by 1780. In 1600, very few adult, never-married women headed a household; by 1780, a significant number of never-married adult urban women did so. Many a married woman also ran her own business, independent from the trade of her husband; such women had an independent legal identity almost everywhere in Europe.

On the level of the most obvious form of individual identity, gender distinction, early modern European society faced dramatic changes. The transition from a society built on groups to one built on individuals transformed the meaning of dependence, and with it the fundamental identity of women. As men struggled to define themselves as individuals, they also faced the question of whether or not women were individuals, too. This problem became manifest during the French Revolution, when the radical Jacobins simultaneously created universal manhood suffrage and destroyed women’s political rights.

Perhaps men had such fears of female individualism because women so clearly took the lead in establishing personal individuality. Women were the first to buy mirrors, which spread to the mass of the population only in the eighteenth century. Mirror in hand, a woman (later a man) could make up her (his) own mind about what she (he) looked like; prior to the widespread use of the mirror, people’s daily image of themselves came overwhelmingly from others. The image people, first women, projected also changed: urban women wore more colorful clothes and began to own a greater variety of garments and accessories. Aside from a few cities in the Low Countries and Italy, only the upper classes (at most, ten percent of the population) had had such sartorial variety prior to 1700. The long-term effects of democratization of dress can be seen on any street today: the modern business suit is an adaptation of the outfit worn by eighteenth-century working men.

At the same time that Europeans faced the move from a society built on groups to one built on individuals, they faced other challenges to familiar identities. All European societies rested on the assumption that people were unequal. Christian doctrine had long emphasized the spiritual equality of souls, but secular society rested on an elaborate system of dominance, often called the society of orders. Nobles dominated commoners; landowners dominated peasants; urban elites dominated countryfolk; men dominated women. Assumptions about innate inequality remained fundamental long after the period under investigation here, but the long simmering popular belief in human equality received new impetus from the Scientific Revolution. René Descartes boldly stated, in his *Discourse on Method* (1637), that all men had reason (in fact, possession of reason made them human), and were thus essentially equal. That doctrine transformed the “woman question,” so long debated in places like France and England. Whereas authors had traditionally
debated who was better, women or men, after Descartes, those supporting rights for women often argued that they were equal. A generation after Descartes, his disciple, François Poullain de la Barre, published *On the Equality of the Two Sexes* (quickly translated from French into English and other languages), built precisely on a syllogistic chain of reasoning that: (1) everyone agreed that all humans had reason; (2) everyone agreed that women were human; (3) therefore, as humans, women *by definition* had reason and were equal to men. Misogynists rejected this argument, on the grounds that women had less developed reason, but modern feminism triumphed on precisely these grounds.

Following lines laid down by Aristotle, European societies also officially believed people were born for a certain function, and that a proper society relied on each person fulfilling that function. Those who tried to move outside their “natural” position threatened society, so they had to be repressed, or punished, or, in extreme cases, eliminated. The man who allowed his wife to run the household might have to listen to “rough music” (charivari) or take a Skimmington ride (be strapped to a pole and paraded through the village); the woman who became engaged to a man from outside her village might be collectively raped by the young male villagers; the wealthy Jew might be assaulted or his house pillaged in a riot; the leader of a demonstration might be drawn and quartered, his body parts left to dangle from trees outside the town gate for a month; the religious nonconformist might be burned at the stake. All of these things did happen, and the forces of order invariably cited attacks on the “natural” order as a justification for their action.

Yet we cannot be misled by either their rhetoric or the occasional violent outbursts of repression. Early modern Europe was a society in motion. All of the assumptions of the fifteenth century had to be abandoned. Europeans had to re-create their identities in every aspect of life. Contrary to the rhetoric of stability and order, or to the model of a stable, sedentary society promulgated by so many modern historians, the social reality was a maelstrom of change. Europeans lived in two worlds: pockets of order and stability existed everywhere, and endured for centuries; around these pockets of order, a world of movement, indeed of apparent chaos, swirled menacingly. Unable to stop it, Europeans spasmodically, violently, and futilely lashed out against it.

This conflict existed in matters as simple as one’s name. Europeans often expressed their individuality by adopting a nickname or public name; wandering journeymen always did so, and most market women followed the same custom. The name could be physical – Big John, Red (haired) Mary, One-Eyed Sam – or geographic – the Parisian, the Fleming. The authorities strictly forbade the use of such names and demanded that everyone, everywhere, at all times use their legal name; the records make it abundantly clear that many people did not. In villages, it would have been absurd, because so many people shared the same name and surname that nicknames were essential. Among journeymen, most of whom belonged to illegal brotherhoods, one could hardly expect them to list their legal name on the registers kept by the brotherhood.

In the realm of faith, the Catholic Church’s God had a difficult three centuries. The early reformers had either failed, like John Wycliffe in England, or been restricted to a small area, like Jan Hus in Bohemia. Their ideas lived on, however; Martin Luther turned them into a spiritual revolution in 1517, when he posted his 95 Theses against indulgences on the door of the Wittenberg castle church. Soon other “Protestants,” as they became known, had raised objections to the doctrines of the Catholic Church and to the moral laxity of its clergy. Reformers within the Catholic Church did much the same. By the second half of the sixteenth century, the various sides in the doctrinal disputes had created real distance among themselves, a process firmly hardened by the decrees of the Council of Trent (1543–63), which codified official Catholic doctrine.

Historians have traditionally viewed the sixteenth century as the great age of the Reformation, of the successful attack on the Catholic Church and the subsequent division of Western Chris-
tendom. Yet contemporaries often had a different view. In the middle of the sixteenth century, Catholics and Protestants alike believed in the possibility of a church council that would reconcile their differences. By the early seventeenth century, the Protestants believed themselves everywhere under siege from a resurgent Catholic Church. Protestant literature often points out the massive advances made by the Catholics outside of Europe, an element of early modern religious history usually ignored by the Eurocentric historiography. Millions of Amerindians converted (often under extreme duress) to Catholicism, and the Catholic Church made inroads in Africa and Asia, too. In many respects the integration of Asian believers into the mainstream Catholic Church posed as great a problem as Protestantism; the Chinese Rites Controversy, in which Jesuits in China argued that Catholic rites there had to integrate Chinese practices and beliefs, ultimately shattered the Jesuit Order and, because of the Pope’s rejection of that position, slowed dramatically the spread of Catholicism worldwide.

The dichotomy between group and individual evolved in a climate of unimaginable chaos. The shattering of the unity of Western Christianity dramatically altered the relationship of neighbor to neighbor and of individual to God, thus of individual to the state. By the 1560s, strong voices argued the direct connection of the individual conscience and God and rejected forced conversion in favor of gentle persuasion.8 These individuals pointed out that force had not worked, and that some form of concord had to be pursued. In most of Western Europe, of course, they lost the argument, leading to another century of religious war, and to a litany of cross-confessional massacre.

By the 1570s, however, one of the great powers, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, had enshrined this principle of concord in its constitution: their state was not only the Commonwealth of Many Nations, but the Commonwealth of Many Religions (Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam). Slowly, grudgingly, the Western European states came around to the same solution: Holland de facto in the seventeenth century; England de facto (with still significant restrictions on Catholics) in the middle of the eighteenth century; France in 1791. The children of European emigrants who created a new state in North America in 1787 understood the logic of the situation: they made it an article of their Constitution that the state could not establish an official Church.

Just as the unity of the Western Christian Church shattered in the early sixteenth century, so, too, did the understanding of the world itself. The European discovery of the Americas, and the integration of the Western Hemisphere into the world economy, revolutionized diets across the globe, introduced new and deadly diseases everywhere (especially among Amerindians), and made every world map in Western Europe obsolete, overnight.

Let us try to enter the worlds of a European in 1500 and in 1780. In 1500, asked to identify himself, a Frenchman might say he was Jean Charpentier, son of Pierre, and perhaps of Marie Le Brun (women did not change names at marriage), daughter of Jean Le Brun, that he lived in the village of X, worked on a given farm, tilling fields A and B (fields had names), and inhabited a certain cottage (also named). Pushed a little, he might have said he lived in a certain “country” (pays), meaning his tiny region, and perhaps noted that he was a subject of the King of France and of the lord under whose jurisdiction he resided. Perhaps he would have known that Jerusalem was the center of the Earth, and that the Sun and the rest of the universe revolved around the Earth. Some peasants, most townspeople would have heard of “Asia,” whence came certain rare products reserved for the wealthy: silk, pepper, cloves. In some regions, Jean might have emphasized that he was a free man, not a serf; it is unlikely he would have said anything about religion, because everyone he knew practiced the same one, so there was no need to say he was a Christian, although that would have been a central part of his identity.
Men in other places might have said a few different things. Jews had been expelled from most of Western Europe by 1500: from England and France by 1400; from Spain in 1492. In 1500, many Jews lived in German, Italian, and Polish towns: tens of thousands of them lived in Provence, spread across 50 towns, but they would be expelled the following year. In those places with Jews, or on the borders touching areas of Eastern Orthodoxy or Islam, a “Christian” (Catholic) man would certainly have placed religion at the center of his identity. Given the Inquisition’s persecutions of Jews and Moslems in sixteenth-century Spain, a Spanish peasant would surely have emphasized his “Christian” identity, even if (rather especially if) he was, as so many were in Valencia, a secret Muslim (Morisco).

Fast-forwarding to 1780, Jean Charpentier would have lost the sure identity of his forefather. He might still live on a named farm, tilling named fields, in a certain village, nestled in his little pays. Yet in most parts of Europe he would have to say he was a “Roman Catholic” or a “Lutheran” or a member of some other Christian Church; he would know he was a Frenchman, a subject of Louis XVI. Most people would have heard of America; many would use its products, like sugar, or grow its plants, like corn or potatoes. Townsmen would know far more about Africa, which produced the slaves to grow the sugar or coffee, and would certainly know that Jerusalem was not the center of the world, let alone the universe. Jean Charpentier (1780) also differed from his ancestors in that he knew his age: seventeenth-century French court records invariably give the ages of peasant or artisan witnesses with a phrase such as “about 40”; in the eighteenth century, every witness would give his or her exact age. In the most developed parts of Western Europe, Jean would also have known how to read and write.

And what of Jeanne Charpentier, in 1500 or 1780, what would she have thought about herself? With respect to religion, occupation, and politics, she and her brother Jean would have been indistinguishable. Within these categories, their self-definitions would have remained fairly constant: for example, female–male division of labor in a household did not alter much. The Jeanne of 1780, like Jean, would have had a much greater sense of herself as an individual, and far greater freedom of action than the Jeanne of 1500. Even as late as the 1680s, in the Beauvaisis region north of Paris, more than eighty percent of peasant women married someone living in their home parish; by 1750, only fifty percent did so. In the eighteenth century, far more single women moved: peasant girls came to towns to work as servants (more than ninety percent of urban female servants were rural emigrants), and saved enough money to provide their own dowry. No longer so dependent on the family for the capital to start a household, women had greater freedom to choose their own partner. The Jeanne of 1780 would have owned a mirror and far more personal items than the Jeanne of 1500. Among the richer peasant families, she would have been literate, although female literacy rates nearly everywhere lagged considerably behind those of men.

Although there had always been deep divisions between urban and rural people, by the late eighteenth century profound differences had arisen in their fundamental beliefs about how the Universe was ordered and, to some extent, why it worked as it did. As David Sabean says in his essay (Part II), describing the feelings of the peasants of Beutelsbach in 1798: “Their behavior had been shaped by the attitude of outsiders who thought that they lived in the kingdom of darkness . . . now, because of the impact of the treatment by the more enlightened and intelligent part of the nation, they had become shamed and embittered.” The outside official, Belley, who conducts the investigation of the burying of the bull in Beutelsbach says, in his report, that “the villagers were not used to thinking about the connection between cause and effect,” that is, in his mind, he and others who did think about cause and effect lived in the enlightened world, created by the Scientific Revolution, while the villagers did not. The rise of the pastoral in art and liter-
nature notwithstanding, urban dwellers overwhelmingly viewed rural people as savages, little understanding urban language (say German or French), and “scarcely better reason,” as one French official wrote in 1675 of the Celtic-speaking Bretons.

The essays in this part speak to the multiplicity of identities held by early modern Europeans. In Thomas Kaiser’s piece on “Ottoman despotism,” we can see how this trope helped Europeans clearly distinguish Christian Europe, what documents of the time call the “Commonwealth of Christianity,” from the Islamic world: “Ottoman Turkey was the heir to all the traditional disparaging Christian tropes regarding Islamic culture – its hypocrisy, baseness, and licentiousness – which the many crusading tracts, histories, travel books . . . endlessly repeated in their lurid narratives of cruelty, violence, ignorance, and corruption.” Even when the French justified their alliance with the Turks, they accepted rather than refuted “Christian Europe’s common opinion that the Turks lacked all humanity.” The French merely argued that engagement, rather than estrangement was the best way to help the “savages” see the light.

Early modern times suffer from interference by their future as well as their past. Nineteenth-century historians everywhere, both consciously and unconsciously, misrepresented the history and ideas of early modern times to serve nationalist agendas of their own times. As Karin Friedrich shows, Royal Prussian local histories never ignored the larger dimension of the wider commonwealth . . . “it is pious work to write the history of one’s fatherland.” Amor patriae, love of the fatherland, never entirely eclipsed the larger context . . . even sixteenth-century Prussian chronicles of monasteries and small towns never lost sight of the history of the whole Prussian province, in which such chronicles were embedded.

She draws from her Prussian sources the fundamental conclusion that nineteenth-century German historians who argued that “Danzig, Thorn, and Elbing were ‘city-states’ which possessed quasi-independence from the Polish-Lithuanian state” and that the German burghers of these cities lived “at odds with a foreign, hostile Polish environment, whose culture they never accepted,” were completely wrong. An ethnically German burgher of Danzig had a strong sense of himself as a citizen of his city, but embedded that citizenship within a sense of being a citizen of Royal Prussia, and of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Royal Prussian writers used the word patria (fatherland) to mean each of these three entities, depending on the context in which they wrote.

Those living on the Atlantic littoral, participating even indirectly in its great imperial enterprise of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, had to think of themselves in an even broader context. They often relied on metaphors drawn from the conflict against Islam, as when Bernal Díaz, one of the conquerors of Mexico, compared Cortez and his men to the “paladin Roland” and his companions. Spanish, French, English, Portuguese, Dutch, and other texts are filled with references to bringing the one “True Faith” to the heathens of the Americas. The Spanish had to deal with far more of them – the Aztec Empire of 1519 had more than twice as many inhabitants as Spain – and had to determine the precise nature of the hitherto unimagined hordes. Bernal Díaz saw a hierarchy among Amerindians: unlike the naked savages of the West Indies, whom he regarded essentially as animals, the inhabitants of the Aztec Empire had all the attributes of real human beings: settled agriculture, a social hierarchy, fine art and craft work, and a capital city whose organization (and cleanliness) put Spanish cities to shame. Some of the Spanish soldiers, even officers, made the ultimate judgment as to the humanity of the Amerindians: they married Amerindian women, after first converting them to Christianity.
Two decades after Cortez’s conquest, at the great debate about the humanity of Amerindians, held at the university in Salamanca, the Emperor Charles V himself ruled in the affirmative: Indians were human. As Anthony Pagden makes clear, this declaration of moral equality necessitated a dramatic shift in imperial thinking. It is all well and good for all men to have souls, but did they have equal reason, and equal political rights? If the Amerindians were human, then “(t)he claims to universal dominium, which were in the first instance the consequence of a gradually changing view of the identity of the optimal political community, necessarily involved the transfer of a definition of humanity from the moral sphere to the political.” In this imperial context, Christianity could take the place that Roman law had once filled, creating “not merely political and social order,” but conferring “an ethical purpose upon the entire community.” At the same time, the necessity of excluding Amerindians from a political role strengthened the old idea of the Roman theorists, like Cicero, that “the civitas, as the sole place of human flourishing, was also, and only, the . . . political community.”

This division of the human community into moral equals and political unequals proved invaluable in the denial of rights to women and in such actions as the justification of slavery in the American Constitution of 1787, or the silence of the Polish Constitution of May 3, 1791 on the issue of serfdom. David Eltis suggests that European conceptions of freedom had a direct hand both in the creation of the Atlantic world built on slave labor outside of Europe, and in the ultimate destruction of that slave system. In the period under consideration here, only the first of those processes was at work, although a powerful abolitionist movement existed, at least in the English-speaking Atlantic, by the 1750s.

The imperial question came up in a different way in East Central Europe, where the Habsburg family inherited an array of ethnically diverse territories, above all the kingdoms of Hungary and Bohemia, which they attached to their archduchy of Austria. Creating a sense of unity in such an empire proved a daunting task, as James Van Horn Melton makes clear. Empress Maria Theresa’s subjects spoke more than a dozen major languages, to say nothing of local dialects. Unlike schools in late nineteenth-century France, which enforced French as the sole acceptable language, grammar schools in Maria Theresa’s far-flung empire usually taught in the local language: in her Hungarian kingdom, teachers used German, Magyar, Slovak, Croat, Ruthenian, Serbian, or Romanian, depending on the language of their students. Compulsory schooling in Maria Theresa’s empire thus simultaneously encouraged a sense of belonging to her empire and of being part of a distinct linguistic and religious group. The Serbian textbooks actually created a literary Serbian language, and thus gave an enormous boost to Serbian self-identity, not at all what the Empress had intended.

Maria Theresa’s schools offer an outstanding example of the complexity of identities and the difficulties of fostering one overarching identity in a world that demanded (and demands) several. French or English peasants, in 1500, knew that they lived in the kingdom of France or England, in a given context thought themselves “French” or “English,” yet rarely had use for such a category of identification. In his everyday life, one was an inhabitant of the village of X, spoke a local language, and practiced the same religion that every person practiced, Christianity. Other parts of Europe had stronger local identities, as in the Italian or German towns, or a more pronounced sense of religious differences, as in Balkan borderlands. German burghers, like those described by Karin Friedrich, identified with a town, with a local principality, and with a larger political community, such as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or the Holy Roman Empire. Elites had an even stronger sense of these multiple communities, particularly the larger ones. As the unity of the Commonwealth of Christianity shattered, and local communities lost power to centralizing states, senses of identity evolved. Language offers the most compelling example: six-
teenth-century intellectuals wrote for an international community of scholars, in the universal language of the West, Latin; eighteenth-century members of the international republic of letters, however committed to that cosmopolitan ideal, wrote in their national languages.

NOTES

1 Fable or not, Mandeville’s *Travels*, written in middle of the fourteenth century, was one of the few Western European books to argue that the world was round, hence Columbus’s affection for it.

2 Canon law prohibited the marriage of those related to each other to the fifth degree – sharing a great-great-grandparent. Prior to the systematic keeping of civil registers (baptism, marriage, death), in practice few demands for an exemption extended beyond sharing a great-grandparent (for example, the bride’s grandmother and groom’s grandfather were brother and sister). Marriage among cousins was fairly common, especially among elites, because it enabled families to keep landed estates intact.

3 Nobles accepted other nobles as equal in a certain way, as fellow citizens, a sentiment particularly pronounced in places such as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but did not accept the equality of a noble and a commoner.

4 Other factors, such as religion, ethnic origin, or skin color could come into play. England, later the United Kingdom, denied Catholics full political rights on the basis of their religion until the end of the nineteenth century. European states denied Jews the status of citizen, on the basis both of religion and, in some cases, “ethnicity.” Political units, whether kingdoms or towns, did have naturalization procedures for immigrants. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the question of skin color became important, especially in European colonies in the Western Hemisphere. Some European states created new rules, such as France’s notorious Black Code, to exclude black people from rights.

5 The German sociologist Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, published in the early twentieth century, argued that Protestantism gave rise to a new moral ethic that created the spirit of capitalism. Weber contrasted this ethic with that of other major world religions; within Europe, he contrasted it sharply with the ethic of Catholicism, which he viewed as inimical to capitalism. Few books have had so great an impact on modern historiography. Many scholars, especially in Great Britain, and to a lesser degree Continental Europe, still accept Weber’s premise. The empirical evidence about early modern European capitalism suggests that Weber had the relationship backwards.

6 Europeans used this same argument against non-Europeans, such as Africans and Amerindians. Acceptance of female “equality” did not mean that a writer abandoned ideas of subordination: Poullain de la Barre placed household authority in the man’s hands.

7 One might draw a contemporary parallel with respect to immigration into the United States and Western Europe. Despite the anti-immigrant rhetoric and “tightened” immigration laws, immigration into both places is at an all-time high. More immigrants entered the United States in the 1990s than in any other decade of its history. These population shifts, now as in early modern Europe, have to do with the larger forces of history, and, in the long term, have little to do with government rhetoric or policies.

8 These early efforts at concord invariably excluded atheists, and, in some cases, radical Christian groups such as the Anabaptists.

9 This difference can have two explanations: either people did not know their own age, or the courts did not care about the exact age of people of the lower classes. The former is more likely, as the courts sometimes did not give an exact age even for those of higher social status.

10 That said, women in 1500 still had unusually high wages, because of the continuing labor shortage in Europe. Women’s wages as a percentage of men’s peaked in about 1475 (at 80 percent in some areas), but dropped catastrophically (to 25–33 percent) by 1600, owing to population growth.

11 Bernal Díaz refers here to the legendary hero of the *Song of Roland*, a twelfth-century French epic poem about the conflict between Christians, led by Charlemagne, and Muslims, in Spain.
The Legacy of Rome

Anthony Pagden

I

The late fifteenth century, enthused the Scottish historian William Robertson in his History of America of 1777, had been the period when Providence decreed that men were to pass the limits within which they had been so long confined, and open themselves to a more ample field wherein to display their talents, their enterprise and courage.¹

Robertson’s was a common sentiment, expressed by his contemporaries, David Hume and Adam Smith in Britain, by the abbé Raynal in France, and by the historiographer royal and Robertson’s associate Juan Bautista Múñoz in Spain. In structural, political and economic terms, the colonies which first Portugal and Spain, then France and Britain, and finally, if also only fitfully, Holland, Sweden and Denmark had established in America were, as all these writers recognized, unquestionably new. Unlike their ancient predecessors, they were remote and ruled across great distances. They had been created out of a seemingly insatiable European need for precious metals, and an ambition, which the Ancients could scarcely have understood, to change the religious beliefs of their autochthonous inhabitants.

Yet for all their apparent, and much discussed, novelty the theoretical roots of the modern European overseas empires reached back into the empires of the Ancient World. It was, above