The Enlightenment

A Very Short Introduction

By John Robertson

Questions for thought and discussion:

- Why is it so difficult to have just one definition of the Enlightenment?
- Why is philosophy important to our understanding of the Enlightenment?
- Should we think of Enlightenment as a uniquely European phenomenon?
- Should Enlightenment be identified with ‘secularization’?
- Why has it been so hard to reach agreement on the principles of religious toleration?
- Why do so many believers, Christian and Muslim, treat the Enlightenment as their enemy? Should they?
- What did it mean to ‘better one’s condition’ in the eighteenth century? What does it mean now?
- Should we regard Jean-Jacques Rousseau as an enemy or an advocate of Enlightenment?
- Why were so many Enlightenment political economists so afraid that international commerce would lead to war?
- Could the Enlightenment have done more for women? How?
- What was the Enlightenment’s concept of ‘public opinion’? Does it differ from ours?
- Was the French Revolution the end of the Enlightenment?
- What do we mean by ‘modernity’?
- Are the Enlightenment’s intellectual achievements a resource we should continue to draw on?
- Does the Enlightenment still matter?

Other books by the author:


A Union for Empire. The Political Thought of the Union of 1707 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Further Reading

