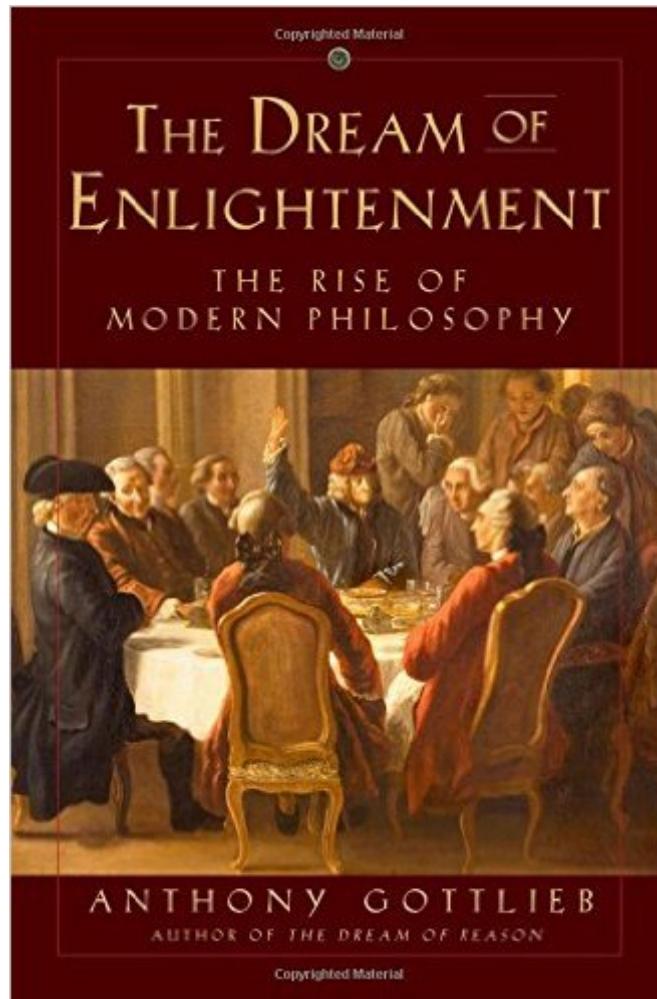


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# The Dream Of Enlightenment: The Rise Of Modern Philosophy



## Synopsis

The author of the classic *The Dream of Reason* vividly explains the rise of modern thought. Western philosophy is now two and a half millennia old, but much of it came in just two staccato bursts, each lasting only about 150 years. In his landmark survey of Western philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance, *The Dream of Reason*, Anthony Gottlieb documented the first burst, which came in the Athens of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Now, in his sequel, *The Dream of Enlightenment*, Gottlieb expertly navigates a second great explosion of thought, taking us to northern Europe in the wake of its wars of religion and the rise of Galilean science. In a relatively short period—•from the early 1640s to the eve of the French Revolution—•Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, and Hume all made their mark. *The Dream of Enlightenment* tells their story and that of the birth of modern philosophy. As Gottlieb explains, all these men were amateurs: none had much to do with any university. They tried to fathom the implications of the new science and of religious upheaval, which led them to question traditional teachings and attitudes. What does the advance of science entail for our understanding of ourselves and for our ideas of God? How should a government deal with religious diversity—and what, actually, is government for? Such questions remain our questions, which is why Descartes, Hobbes, and the others are still pondered today. Yet it is because we still want to hear them that we can easily get these philosophers wrong. It is tempting to think they speak our language and live in our world; but to understand them properly, we must step back into their shoes. Gottlieb puts readers in the minds of these frequently misinterpreted figures, elucidating the history of their times and the development of scientific ideas while engagingly explaining their arguments and assessing their legacy in lively prose. With chapters focusing on Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Pierre Bayle, Leibniz, Hume, Rousseau, and Voltaire—and many walk-on parts—•*The Dream of Enlightenment* creates a sweeping account of what the Enlightenment amounted to, and why we are still in its debt.

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## Customer Reviews

Philosophy and theology both suffer from the same problem: they are entirely based upon assumptions that are unfounded and from which no useful knowledge can be derived. This has, however, not prevented a great many people from spending a great many years pondering a variety of questions which, from a strictly empirical perspective, can be regarded as formally meaningless. Nevertheless, from such intellectual blunderings in the darkness, some adumbration of more adequate modes of thought was intermittently achieved and this general outcome we term The Enlightenment. Gottlieb's account is thoughtful, reasonably thorough, and at times pleasingly witty. He covers the central elements of the works of the best-known philosophers from Descartes up to (but not including) Kant. From a world of near-total intellectual darkness in which the mutterings of priests and the scribbles in holy books were regarded as the ne plus ultra of human knowledge, Enlightenment thinkers began to create tiny sparks that ultimately would illuminate a much broader and more useful intellectual domain. Questions such as "how can we know what we know?" forced the more adequate minds of the age to confront the gaps in what was previously taken for granted and although much of the work turned out to be intellectual dead-ends it nevertheless helped break the deathly grip of medieval ideas. By intermingling occasional personal details with his precise of each writer's work, Gottlieb both lightens the burden and provides some insight into the combination of factors that ultimately resulted in particular intellectual positions or predilections. For those interested in such matters, the work is a good primer that can point to further reading.

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