

that people could use logic to discover new truths. Building on Greek ideas, Roman thinkers developed the concept of natural law, the idea that a law governed how the world operated.

With Greek and Roman beliefs as guidelines, Enlightenment thinkers began studying the world in a new way. They applied these beliefs not just to the natural world but also to the human world of society and government.

Christianity The history of Christianity in Europe provides other clues about ideas that emerged in the Enlightenment. One religious thinker, Thomas Aquinas, had taught in the Middle Ages that faith paired with reason could explain the world. Although it owed a great deal to Aquinas, the Enlightenment was mostly a secular, or nonreligious, movement. Enlightenment thinkers disagreed with the church's claims to authority and its intolerance toward non-Christian beliefs.

The Renaissance and Reformation Other reactions to the Christian Church in Europe also influenced the ideas of the Enlightenment. For example, some Renaissance thinkers used Greek and Roman ideas to raise questions about established religious beliefs. These Renaissance thinkers were known as humanists.

Although most humanists were religious, they focused on human value and achievement rather than on the glory of God. Renaissance humanists believed people could improve their world by studying it and changing it. These ideas contributed to the Enlightenment idea of progress—the belief that humans were capable of improving their world.

Some Reformation ideas also reappeared during the Enlightenment. Like Martin Luther and other reformers, Enlightenment scholars questioned church authority. They found that religious beliefs didn't always fit in with what they learned from their logical study of the world.

Ideas of the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment is also called the Age of Reason because reason, or logical thought, is a basic part of all Enlightenment ideas.

- The ability to reason is what makes humans unique.
- Reason can be used to solve problems and improve people's lives.
- Reason can free people from ignorance, superstition, and unfair government.
- The natural world is governed by laws that can be discovered through reason.
- Like the natural world, human behavior is governed by natural laws.
- Governments should reflect natural laws and encourage education and debate.