

## Enlightenment Writers against Mercantilism, Religious Oppression, and Slavery

### ***Excerpts from Of the Balance of Trade, David Hume***

*Hume attacked the notion that a country gains anything by raising its tariffs; he argued that English tariffs were actually hurting England:*

Our jealousy and our hatred of France are without bounds.... These passions have occasioned innumerable barriers and obstructions upon commerce.... But what have we gained by the bargain? We lost the French market for our woollen manufactures, and transferred the commerce of wine to Spain and Portugal, where we buy worse liquor at a higher price. There are few Englishmen who would not think their country absolutely ruined, were French wines sold in England so cheap and in such abundance as to supplant, in some measure, all ale, and home- brewed liquors: But... [were we to] lay aside prejudice, it would not be difficult to prove, that nothing could be more.... advantageous. Each new acre of vineyard planted in France, in order to supply England with wine, would make it... [necessary] for the French to take the produce of an English acre, sown in wheat or barley, in order to subsist themselves....

### ***Excerpts from Wealth of Nations, Adam Smith***

*How did Smith distinguish (a) countries that had colonies, from (b) countries that didn't? What one thing did the mother countries "enjoy," as a result of acquiring a colony?*

The countries which possess the colonies of America, and which trade directly to the East Indies, enjoy, indeed, the whole show and splendour of this great commerce. Other countries, however, notwithstanding all the invidious restraints by which it is meant to exclude them, frequently enjoy a greater share of the real benefit of it. The colonies of Spain and Portugal, for example, give more real encouragement to the industry of other countries than to that of Spain and Portugal. . .

After all the unjust attempts, therefore, of every country in Europe to engross to itself the whole advantage of the trade of its own colonies, no country has yet been able to engross to itself anything but the expense of supporting in time of peace, and of defending in time of war, the oppressive authority which it assumes over them. The inconveniencies resulting from the possession of its colonies, every country has engrossed to itself completely. The advantages resulting from their trade it has been obliged to share with many other countries.

*Does Smith say that Britain had no right to levy taxes on the American colonies? Does Smith believe that Britain in fact had an actual colonial empire? What did he advise the British to do, if they couldn't get the Americans to pay their share of the expenses of running the empire?*

America should contribute towards the discharge of the public debt of Great Britain. . . to which all the colonies of America owe the liberty, security, and property which they have ever since enjoyed. That public debt has been contracted in the defence, not of Great Britain alone, but of all the different provinces of the empire; the immense debt contracted in the late war in particular, and a great part of that contracted in the war before, were both properly contracted in defence of America. . .

It was because the colonies were supposed to be provinces of the British empire, that this expense was laid out upon them. But countries which contribute neither revenue nor military force towards the support of the empire, cannot be considered as provinces [of an empire].... If the colonies, notwithstanding their refusal to submit to British taxes, are still to be considered as provinces of the British empire, their defence in some future war may cost Great Britain as great an expense as it ever has done in any former war. The rulers of Great Britain have, for more than a century past, amused the people with the imagination that they possessed a great empire on the west side of the Atlantic.... If the project cannot be completed, it ought to be given up. If any of the provinces of the British empire cannot be made to contribute towards the support of the whole empire, it is surely time that Great Britain should free herself from the expense of defending those provinces in time of war, and of supporting any part of their civil or military establishments in time of peace....

### ***Excerpts from Voltaire's A Treatise on Toleration (1763)***

*What two reasons does Voltaire give, for labeling the religious leaders of his day, "wild beasts"?*

If the masters of errors, and I'm speaking here of the grand masters, so long paid and honored for abusing the human species, ordered us today to believe that the seed must die in order to germinate; that the world is immovable on its foundations, that it does not orbit around the sun; that the tides are not a natural effect of gravitation; that the rainbow is not formed by the refraction and the reflection of rays of light, and so on, and they based their ordinances on passages poorly understood from the Holy Bible, how would educated men regard these men? Would the term "beasts" seem too strong? And if these wise masters used force and persecution to enforce their insolent stupidity, would the term "wild beasts" seem too extreme?

*In Voltaire's eyes, what was the worst and most dangerous superstition?*

But of all these superstitions, is not the most dangerous that of hating your neighbor for his opinions? And is it not evident that it would be much more reasonable to worship the Holy Navel, the Holy Foreskin, or the milk or the robe of the Virgin Mary, [all of these were relics worshipped at the time] than to detest and persecute your brother?....

The fewer dogmas, the fewer disputes; the fewer disputes, the fewer miseries: if this is not true, then I'm wrong.

Religion was instituted to make us happy in this life and in the other. What must we do to be happy in the life to come? Be just.

What must we do in order to be happy in this life, as far as the misery of our nature permits? Be indulgent.

It would be the height of folly to pretend to improve all men to the point that they think in a uniform manner about metaphysics. it would be easier to subjugate the entire universe through force of arms than to subjugate the minds of a single village. . . .

***Excerpts from African Slavery In America, by Thomas Paine***

That some desperate wretches should be willing to steal and enslave men by violence and murder for gain, is rather lamentable than strange. But that many civilized, nay, Christianized people should approve, and be concerned in the savage practice, is surprising; and still persist, though it has been so often proved contrary to the light of nature, to every principle of Justice and Humanity, and even good policy, by a succession of eminent men, and several late publications.

Our traders in men (an unnatural commodity!) must know the wickedness of the slave-trade, if they attend to reasoning, or the dictates of their own hearts: and such as shun and stifle all these, willfully sacrifice conscience, and the character of integrity to that golden idol....

Most shocking of all is alleging the sacred scriptures to favor this wicked practice. One would have thought none but infidel cavillers [picky fault-finders] would endeavor to make them appear contrary to the plain dictates of natural light, and the conscience, in a matter of common Justice and Humanity; which they cannot be. Such worthy men, as referred to before, judged otherways; Mr. Baxter declared, "The slave-traders should be called Devils, rather than Christians; and that it is a heinous crime to buy them" ....

But the chief design of this paper is not to disprove it, which many have sufficiently done; but to entreat Americans to consider.

1. With what consistency, or decency they complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousands in slavery; and annually enslave many thousands more, without any pretence of authority, or claim upon them?
2. How just, how suitable to our crime is the punishment with which Providence threatens us? We have enslaved multitudes, and shed much innocent blood in doing it; and now are threatened with the same. And while other evils are confessed, and bewailed, why not this especially, and publicly; than which no other vice, if all others, has brought so much guilt on the land?
3. Whether, then, all ought not immediately to discontinue and renounce it, with grief and abhorrence? Should not every society bear testimony against it, and account obstinate persisters in it bad men, enemies to their country, and exclude them from fellowship; as they often do for much lesser faults?

These are the sentiments of justice and humanity.