

CHAPTER

2

SECTION 1

Section Summary

PHILOSOPHY IN THE AGE OF REASON

In the 1500s and 1600s, the Scientific Revolution changed the way people looked at the world. They began to use reason and science to learn how things worked. For example, they found that rules govern natural forces such as gravity. Scientists and others began to call these rules the **natural law**. They believed that natural law could be used to solve society's problems, too. In this way the Scientific Revolution sparked another revolution in thinking known as the Enlightenment.

Two important English thinkers of the Enlightenment were **Thomas Hobbes** and **John Locke**. Hobbes argued that people were naturally cruel and selfish. They needed to be controlled by a powerful government, such as an absolute monarchy. According to Hobbes, people made an agreement, or **social contract**. In this contract, people gave up their freedom in exchange for an organized society. In contrast, Locke thought that people were basically good. He believed that people had **natural rights**, or rights that belonged to all humans. These are the right to life, liberty, and property. Locke rejected absolute monarchy. He thought a government of limited power was best.

French Enlightenment thinkers, called *philosophes*, also believed that people could use reason to improve government, law, and society. These thinkers included Baron de **Montesquieu**, **Voltaire**, **Denis Diderot**, and Jean-Jacques **Rousseau**. Montesquieu, for example, developed the ideas of separation of powers and of checks and balances. These ideas would be used by the Framers of the United States Constitution. In a set of books called the *Encyclopedia*, Diderot explained the new ideas on the topics of government, philosophy, and religion.

Other thinkers, including **Adam Smith**, focused on using natural law to reform the economy. Instead of government control, they urged the policy of **laissez faire**. This allowed the free market to regulate business.

Review Questions

1. What is the natural law?

2. Which of Montesquieu's ideas appear in the U.S. Constitution?

READING CHECK

Who were the *philosophes*?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

Find the word *philosophy* in the underlined sentence. The word *philosophy* comes from a Greek word that means "love of wisdom." *Philosophe*, which means "philosopher," comes from the same ancient Greek word. Reread the paragraph about the *philosophes*. Use the word-origin clues to help you figure out what *philosophy* means.

READING SKILL

Summarize What did Thomas Hobbes believe about people and the government?
