The early modern world, marked perhaps most importantly by the introduction of an Enlightenment paradigm of thought, influences quite perceptibly many aspects of modern day thinking and life. Many factors intermingled to provide a modern type of thinking, including the growing Protestant movement, the work of various philosophers seeking knowledge derived outside of religious tutelage, and the occurrence of various revolutions and changes in the norms of both political and regular life. This essay will explore the religious, geographical, philosophical, and artistic factors that gave rise to the Enlightenment ideas that influence so heavily contemporary life.

The first condition we can analyze that gave rise to the early modern world was the growing protestant influence. King Henry VIII, an English king, separated himself and much of the country from the Catholic Church. This served to further catalyze the vocal and noisy nature of English Protestants protesting and debating various religious tenets. While this surely led to a further schism between Protestant groups and the Catholic Church, it also prompted further the development of religious toleration, especially through the writings of English philosopher John Locke in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*. With the further development of tolerance, the dissemination of various religious ideas was likely further facilitated, and conditions of the more modern world like the Second Great Awakening and the plethora of religious groups in the modern Western world has likely been significantly influenced by these events.

The next factor that ought to be considered is the work of various philosophers. Included in their writings are very identifiable motifs and ideas that are exceptionally prevalent in modern thought. Kant in his essay *What is Enlightenment?* draws a direct comparison between animals and people without thought: “After the guardians have first made their domestic cattle dumb and have made sure that these placid creatures will not dare take a single step without the harness of the cart to which they are tethered…” Kant’s ideas include primarily that we must free ourselves from “self-incurred tutelage.” This is what Enlightenment essentially is: stepping away from “guardians” or other figures who teach us how to think and inculcate various ideas into our minds. Developing the courage, and avoiding the laziness, necessary to engage in this process. Other philosophers, like John Locke, have encouraged education and have propagated the idea of “tabula rasa”, which translates to “blank slate”, meaning that all people, at birth, are blank slates. They have had no ideas implanted into their minds, but develop them through their experiences and education.

We can also consider the geography over which the Enlightenment occurred. The Enlightenment pertains, as does the material in this class, to the Occident, the Western world. Therefore, its ideas existed largely throughout Western Europe and the newly established United States. In France, we see the ideas of equality and a fervor for individual freedom. These ideas influenced the foundation of the United States. The Founding Fathers, drawing from both the real examples of the French Revolution, and the thoughts of John Locke, Adam Smith, and others, noticed the importance of a people to be able to overthrow their government. They also recognized that power came from the people. These were very central ideas in the establishment of the US government. The establishment of the US, its constitution, and other documents, as well as its quick rise to prominence have surely further disseminated Enlightenment ideas, especially when analyzing the present and considering that our constitution is the oldest of any constitution still used, and that all nations (with the exception of three) have developed similar written constitutions.

We can finally consider the influence of art and music in the early modern world. David’s neoclassical *Oath of the Horatii* reflected on a period of conflict in Roman history. This painting came in the year 1784 and in the nation of France, just around the time when tensions and challenges would give rise to the storming of the Bastille and the French Revolution. It was immediately esteemed highly by both critic and public. Perhaps it served to instigate subsequent revolutionary action. We can also approach Beethoven’s *Eroica* symphony, which glorified heroic actions or heroism in general, having originally been ascribed to Napoleon and surely the ideas of freedom that he initially embodied. This likely also played a role in disseminating Enlightenment thought and ideals, particularly as it glorified heroism that related particularly to the liberty, fraternity, and equality embodied by early Napoleon and the Enlightenment generally.

It is clear that Enlightenment thought has had tremendous impacts for the world. Laying the foundations for liberalism and democracy, as well as scientific achievement, and being evidently responsible for proliferation of wealth throughout the modern world, Enlightenment thinking has shown good fruits abroad. How can we ensure that such ideals do not come under attack but continue to prevail? We can start by doing exactly what Kant suggested: freeing ourselves of “guardians” (who were not really guardians at all, but rather perhaps oppressors) and continuing to enlighten and expand our own minds, as well as that of the public’s.\*

\*We would also do well to take note that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only message that can “eliminate contention in our society.” Included in the Book of Mormon and the gospel are many enlightenment ideals, such as: “But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29), and: “Now this was alarming to the people of the church, and also to all those who had not been drawn away after the persuasions of Amlici; for they knew that according to their law that such things must be established by the voice of the people” (Alma 2:3).

Likewise, “no other message is more vital to our happiness—now and forever. No other message is more filled with hope.” (President Russell M. Nelson, “Christ is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains).