

“I Think, Therefore I Am”

The Enlightenment (also known as the Age of Reason) was an 18th century European movement in which thinkers attempted to apply the principles of reason and the scientific method to all aspects of society including government, religion, economics and education.

By the 18th century the ideas of the Scientific Revolution were no longer limited to a handful of scholars. The invention of the printing press and book-making saw the rise of scientific societies and greater areas of learning and thinking.

Along with this expansion of learning came a new approach to knowledge – **HUMANISM**. It involved human reasoning, skepticism of authority and the expression of natural laws. The Enlightenment also produced thinking that was against the superstitions, ignorance and the corruption that was associated with the established Christian church.

Adam Smith was a Scottish professor (1723-1790) who formulated laws of economics and how the economy works. His theory, if followed, would create favorable results for society. Smith’s laws and theories are still taught and followed by countries around the world today.

Growing numbers of people believed that the long-term effects of scientific development would be “**enlightenment**,” a term now used to describe 18th century Europe. If human reason could discover and explain the laws that governed the universe then it could also uncover ways in which mankind could govern itself more effectively.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) – a prominent German intellectual once stated:-

*“What is Enlightenment? – It is man’s emergence from his self-imposed...
inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance...
Dare to Know!*

*“Have the courage to use your own understanding” is therefore the motto of
the enlightenment.”*

Enlightenment thinkers believed in the power of knowledge to transform human society. They were also critical of their present-day society and possessed an open-mind, asked many questions. Many such thinkers were against political and religious authority, although some were less harsh on these rulers than others.

Many Enlightened thinkers attacked the theory of “Divine Right” and the so-called privileges of European aristocratic society.

John Locke (1632-1704) was an English philosopher who offered principles for construction a constitutional government. His view was more of a contract between the rulers and those ruled.

The Enlightenment reached its height in France in the mid-1700s. Paris became the meeting place for people who wanted to discuss politics and ideas. The social critics of this period in France were known as **Philosophes**, the French word for philosophers.

These philosophes believed that people could apply reason to all aspects of life – just as Isaac Newton had applied reason to science.

Five (5) important concepts formed the core of their philosophy:-

1. **Reason** – Enlightened thinkers believed truth could be discovered through reason or logical thinking. Reason was the absence of intolerance, bigotry, or prejudice in one's thinking.
2. **Nature** – The philosophes often referred to nature; what was natural was also good and reasonable. They believed that there were natural laws of economics and politics just as there were natural laws for motion
3. **Happiness** – A person who lived by nature's laws would find happiness. They did not believe that a person should live in misery then find happiness in the afterlife. They wanted well-being on earth, not in heaven
4. **Progress** – they wanted progress for society. They believed that society could and should use the scientific approach to progress
5. **Liberty** – The philosophes envied the freedom of the English from the Glorious Revolution and Bill of Rights. In France there were many restrictions on speech, religion, trade and personal travel. Through reason their society could be set free.

Voltaire (1694-1778) - **Voltaire** was his pen name used to publish from then 70 books of political essays, philosophy, history, fiction and drama. His real name was François Marie Arouet. He was the most brilliant and influential of the philosophes. He was somewhat arrogant and made frequent targets of the clergy, the aristocracy, and the government. For this he was jailed twice and was an enemy of the French court. In 1734, after outraging the French king and the Catholic bishops he fled France.

In his book, the *Treatise on Toleration* which took a sarcastic view towards religious intolerance.

“This little globe, nothing more than a point, rolls in space like so many other globes; we are lost at its immensity. Man, some five feet tall, is surely a very small part of the universe. One of these imperceptible (hardly noticeable) beings says to some of his neighbors in Arabia or Africa: “Listen to me, for the God of all these worlds has enlightened me; there are nine hundred million little ants like us on earth, but only my anthill is beloved of God; He will hold all others, in horror through eternity; only mine will be blessed, the others will be eternally wretched.”

Voltaire, like many others during the Enlightenment, believed in **deism**. An excellent analogy of a **deist** is that he/she believed in a rather abstract and remote deity, sometimes compared to a clockmaker who created the world, but not in a personal God who intervened in history or tampered with the natural law.

Other Enlightened thinkers were **Pantheists** – those who believed that God and nature were identical. Some were radical, especially three Dutchmen who wrote the *Treatise of Three Imposters*, which claimed that Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were fraudulent imposters and that they based their teachings on the ignorance of people and that they vowed to keep them ignorant for the rest of their lives.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment were also influenced by other parts of the world, they had a global awareness. Voltaire studied in depth the empire of China and how it was governed by an elite staff of secular scholars. He often contrasted this system to the continent of Europe, where aristocratic birth and military prowess (ability) were more important.

Ironically, throughout most of the 18th century, the elite and wealthy had a fad for Chinese furnishings, such as furniture, artwork, chinaware and wallpaper.

Voltaire corresponded with several other European monarchs and nobles. At the invitation of the Prussian King, Frederick II, he spent three years at his palace. In the last year the friendship between the two broke up.

Baron de Montesquieu advocated for political liberties. He was born an aristocrat and then became a lawyer and a historian. He claimed that Ancient Rome's collapse was directly related to its loss of political liberties. Like Voltaire, he believed that the best-governed country in Europe was Britain.

He admired their balance of powers and called this the **Separation of Powers**:-

- The British king and his ministers held **executive power** and carried out the laws of the state.
- The members of parliament held **legislative** or law making powers.
- The judges of the English courts held the **judicial** power. They interpreted laws to see how each applied to a specific case.

Montesquieu's book, *On the Spirit of Laws* was admired by the political leaders of the North American colonies. His systems of **separation of powers** along with the theory of **checks and balances** became the basis for the Constitution of the United States.

Jean Jacques Rousseau was the son of a Swiss watchmaker and grew up in poverty. He worked in several professions and eventually went to Paris because of his essay writing. He often disagreed with other philosophes, especially over a person's role in society. He said "**Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains**" meaning that civilization corrupts a person's natural goodness. He believed that the only good government was one that was freely formed by the people and guided by the "general-will" of society, namely a **direct democracy**. Under this government people willingly gave up some of their freedom for the common good of the people (*The Social Contract*). Rousseau believed that all people were equal and that titles of nobility should be abolished. Many of his ideas inspired the leaders of the French revolution in 1789. Rousseau still had a traditional view towards women. He believed that a girl's education should mainly teach her about how to be a helpful wife and mother. He also did not like women reading novels, they encouraged idleness and wickedness.

Cesare Bonesana Beccaria was an Italian philosophe who focused on the legal system. He believed that laws existed to preserve social order, not to avenge crimes. He openly advocated in his book *Crimes and Punishments*, for an end to torturing witnesses and suspects, improper trials and ending punishments that were cruel and unnecessary. He believed that a person had a right to a speedy trial and torture and capital punishment should be abolished. Any punishment, according to Beccaria, should be based on the seriousness of the crime committed.

Women were also part of the Enlightenment. They advocated for the education of women which would help them raise their status in society.

Mary Astell was an English writer who in 1694 wrote: *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*. She focused on the lack of education for women and in her later works even discussed and criticized the unequal relationship between men and women in marriage. Perhaps her most notable comment is: "If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?"

Mary Wollstonecraft was another English author. Her first book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, openly disagrees with Rousseau. She argues that education for women is essential. Even if they are solely to become mothers, education will make them a better mother! She also believed that women should have the right to become doctors, and not just nurses. She argued for women's rights to participate in politics.

Emilie du Châtelet was born into the world of French aristocracy and therefore was afforded a rare education. She specialized in the sciences and became a trained mathematician and physicist. She translated Newton's work from Latin into French.

Women played an indirect role during the Enlightenment. In Paris and other European cities, wealthy women held social gatherings called **salons**. At these vents philosophers, writers, scientists, artists and other intellectuals discussed ideas and enjoyed artistic performances. Perhaps the most influential of these hostesses was

Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin. She was self-educated and came from the French middle-class but soon rose to becoming one of the most elite women in France. She was friends with both philosophes and heads of state. She was known to regularly correspond with the king of Sweden and Catherine the Great of Russia. Geoffrin was the person who financed the project of Denis Diderot when he envisioned his creation the *Encyclopedia*.

Art, Architecture and Literature all changed during the Enlightenment. The old **Baroque** style (grand and ornate) of the 1600s and early 1700s had been replaced by the **NEOCLASSICAL** style (new classical). It is from this period that we create what we call today **classical music**. This age was dominated by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

The arts began to reflect the new emphasis on order and balance. Styles reverted back to being simple and elegant, copies of the themes from classical Rome and Greece.

One of the best-known artists was **Francisco Goya**, the Spanish artist who created a series of engravings called *Los Caprichos* in 1797. His work satires Spanish politics and society and criticizes a wide range of “human errors and evils.”

Two other well known painters from the Enlightenment were:

William Hogarth (England) who painted satires about the British government, including scenes of political corruption. Hogarth painted with a detailed, realistic style, especially toward the people on his canvas.

Jean-Baptiste Chardin specialized in portraits. Many included women of the middle-class at leisure, some were even reading!

Women were also prominent in the field of art. The French painter, **Elisabeth-Louise Vigâe-Le Brun** was one of the most celebrated portrait painters in Europe. She became the favorite painter of Queen Marie Antoinette. Her portraits brought out the personalities of her subjects.

KEY PEOPLE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

SCIENTISTS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Scientist	Work	Main Contributions
Nicolaus Copernicus	<i>On the Revolutions of Heavenly Orbs</i> (1543)	Heliocentric Theory – believed that the Earth and other planets revolved around the Sun – used mathematical calculations, not observation
Galileo Galilei	<i>Dialogues on the Two New Sciences</i> (1632)	Used telescope to prove planets revolved around Sun; laws of motion on Earth; observed sunspots; mountains on the Moon
Isaac Newton	<i>Principia (The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy</i> (1687))	Universal Law of Gravitation – explained movement on Earth and in solar system: co-developed calculus.
Rene Descartes	<i>Discourse on Method</i> (1637)	Used reason (“I think, therefore I am”) to arrive at truth; invented coordinate geometry; believed science should be applied to practical arts

WRITERS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Author & Work	Main Ideas	Impact
<p>Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) <i>Leviathan (1651)</i></p>	<p>All humans were naturally selfish and wicked and needed a government to rule them. People give up their rights to a strong ruler, in turn gain law and order.</p>	<p>Helps absolute monarchs as he believed best government was an absolute monarchy: created the <i>Social Contract</i></p>
<p>John Locke (1632-1704) <i>Two Treatises of Government (1690)</i></p>	<p>All men have natural rights of life, liberty, property; men have a right of revolution if government fails to protect rights</p>	<p>Influenced Thomas Jefferson and <i>Declaration of Independence</i>; used many times to justify revolutions against unjust governments</p>
<p>Voltaire (1694-1778) [Francois Marie Arouet] <i>Letters on the English (1728)</i></p>	<p>Admired the relative freedom of religion and press in England; believed enlightened despots should use power to benefit people</p>	<p>Increased English pride in freedoms resulted in rise of enlightened despots</p>
<p>Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) <i>Social Contract (1761)</i></p>	<p>Believed “man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains”; wanted men to give power to government [General Will] which would act for the common good with consent of people</p>	<p>Influenced development of democracy – government “of the people, by the people, for the people”</p>
<p>Montesquieu (1689-1755) [Charles Louis de Secondat] <i>The Spirit of the Laws (1748)</i></p>	<p>Baron de Montesquieu believed in separation of powers (legislative/judicial/executive); wanted balance of power among various elements in government</p>	<p>Influenced structure of the <i>U.S. Constitution</i> and other constitutions based in it</p>
<p>Cesare Bonesana Beccaria (1738-1794) <i>Crimes and Punishments (1764)</i></p>	<p>Laws existed to preserve social order, not to avenge crimes. A person accused of a crime had the right to a speedy trial</p>	<p>Torture outlawed or reduced in Western Europe and the Americas; capital punishment abolished in many countries; his ideas became part of <i>U.S. Bill of Rights</i></p>

OTHER KEY PEOPLE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Person	Work and Contributions
Adam Smith (English)	Economist who wrote: <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> , if individuals freely followed their own self-interest, the world would be orderly.
Mary Wollstonecraft (English)	Wrote: <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i> arguing that women deserved the same rights as men.
Denis Diderot (French)	Created a large set of books of articles, essays and drawings for scholars – the <i>Encyclopedia</i>
Franz Joseph Haydn (Austrian)	The new musical forms called the sonata and the symphony
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Austrian)	Wrote first opera at age 12 <i>The Marriage of Figaro, Don Giovanni, The Magic Flute</i> , 600 in total
Ludwig van Beethoven (German)	Piano music, string quartets, stirring symphonies. Carried music into the Age of Romanticism
Samuel Richardson (English)	Wrote <i>Pamela</i> - the first true English novel
Henry Fielding (English)	Wrote the novel <i>Tom Jones</i>
Daniel Defoe (English)	Wrote the novel <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
Jonathan Swift (English)	Wrote <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> in 1726

ENLIGHTENED DESPOTS

The philosophes tried to convince many European monarchs to rule justly. Some monarchs embraced these new ideas and made reforms that reflected the Enlightenment's way of thinking. They became known as **Enlightened Despots** – the French word **despot** meaning **Absolute Ruler**.

An enlightened despot supported the philosophes' ideas BUT they also had no intention of giving up any power.

An example of these differences can be seen with the two statements made by Louis XIV of France and Frederick the Great of Prussia.

Louis XIV – “I am the state”

Frederick the Great – “I am the first servant of the state”

Any changes an Enlightened Despot made were motivated by two desires:-

1. they wanted to make their countries stronger
2. they wanted their own rule to be more effective

Frederick the Great – Frederick II - king of Prussia from 1740 to 1786

Frederick was a follower and friend of Voltaire. He granted many religious freedoms, reduced censorship and improved education. He also reformed the justice system and abolished the use of torture.

However, his changes only went so far. He believed that serfdom was wrong but did nothing to end it. He needed the support of his wealthy landowners (the Junkers) and if he removed serfdom then he would lose their support. Frederick never changes any of the social order problems that existed within his country.

Maria Theresa of Austria – queen of Austria from 1740-1780. She established paid bureaucracy of civil servants for her government. She attempted to ease the burdens of serfdom for her peasants. She did pass a unique law establishing a tariff union for various parts of the empire. Sadly she died at the age of 40 but her work was carried on.

Joseph II of Austria. He was the son of Maria Theresa and ruled Austria from 1780 to 1790. He was the most radical royal reformer. He made legal reforms and gave his people freedom of the press. He also supported freedom of worship – for Protestants, Orthodox Christians and Jews. His most radical reform was to abolish serfdom. His decree ordered that peasants be paid in cash for their manual labor.

Joseph's ideas were protested by the wealthy landowners of Austria. Not surprisingly, after he died, serfdom was reinstated within Austria.

Catherine the Great – Catherine II of Russia from 1762-1796

Catherine II was well educated and exchanged many letters with Voltaire. She ruled with absolute authority but also took steps to modernize and reform Russia. She reformed some of the laws by using the ideas of Montesquieu and Beccaria. She made many recommendations to her courts and nobles to allow religious toleration, abolish torture and capital punishment. However none of these “recommendations” were put into place. Catherine eventually put into place limited reforms, but she did very little to improve the life of a Russian peasant.

A peasant uprising in 1773 changed Catherine’s enlightenment ideas. With great brutality her army crushed the rebellion. She was now convinced that her source of power was with the nobles. She transferred her absolute power over to them. As a result, Russian serfs lost their last traces of freedom. The nobles ensured that peasants would have little or no rights in Russia.

Catherine expanded Russian territory during the Enlightenment. Previously, Peter the Great had fought for years to capture a port on the Baltic Sea. Catherine continued his plan. She fought two wars against the Ottoman Turks, her armies finally winning control of the northern shore of the Black Sea. Her victory also allowed Russian ships to freely pass through the straits from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea without any Ottoman interference.

Catherine also expanded westward, into Poland, where the king was weak and independent nobles held most of the power. Then the three countries of Russia, Prussia and Austria began exerting their power over the feebly run Poland. In 1772 the three countries divided up Poland – The First Partition of Poland. There were further partitions in 1793 and 1795, each country grabbed a piece of any lands that were left. This meant that the country of Poland disappeared off the map of Europe, it was not to reappear until World War I had ended, when it once again became an independent country.

By the end of her reign, Catherine the Great had enlarged her Russian empire. Russia was now becoming an international power.

PEASANTS DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Most Europeans were peasants. They still continued to live in small, rural villages. Their lives were virtually untouched and were not changed by the emerging middle-class culture.

The conditions for peasants in Western and Eastern Europe were very different. The chart below shows some of these differences

In Western Europe	In Eastern Europe
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peasants were no longer serfs• They could now rent or own land• They were hired as day laborers• By the late 1700s, some sought reforms and justice from their governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peasants were still serfs• They could be sold with the land and were considered property, not people• They continued to owe labor to their lords• Some peasants were forced to serve as soldiers for their lord and master

WHAT MADE THE ENLIGHTENMENT REVOLUTIONARY?

Historians agree that it was the idea of progress and that human society could be changed, improved, by human actions that were guided by reason. It was no longer a fixed society or a society ruled by divine command.

The eight (8) items listed below are the major achievements that took place in the world once the Enlightenment took place. It was indeed an Age of Reason, a time when people were given a reason for change.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

1. Inspiration for Revolutions

- America
- France
- Haiti
- Latin America

2. The “Real Improvement of Humanity”

- according to Frenchman **Marquis de Condorcet** (1743-1794)

He saw that the future would hold the end of slavery, racism, gender inequality, supernatural religions, political tyranny and contagious diseases.

3. Too much reliance on human reason

– per Frenchman **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778)

He minimized the importance of book-learning for children; he believed they should be immersed in nature. This taught self-reliance and generosity not greed and envy.

4. The Romantic Movement in Art and Literature

Appealing to emotion, intuition, passion and imagination, not cold reasoning.

5. Religious Awakenings

Fiery sermons, public repentance, personal experiences of sin and redemption
Created waves of religious enthusiasm in Protestant Europe and North America

6. **Charles Darwin** (English) 1809-1882

His two books *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) covered evolution by natural selection and shattered traditional religious views.

7. **Karl Marx** (German) (1818-1883) [along with **Friedrich Engels**]

Saw himself as a scientist who tried to explain events in a rational way. He did not believe in heavenly intervention, the divine right of kings, nor did he believe in chance. He saw change and struggle within the social classes and the coming of socialism in his book *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).

8. **Sigmund Freud** (Austrian) 1856-1939

Applied scientific techniques to the operations of the human mind and emotions. His later work did cast doubt on the Enlightenment conceptions of human rationality. He believed that people live their lives in a ceaseless struggle between their irrational drives and the claims of conscience. He disputed the concept of human rationality, only after it had existed during the Enlightenment.