

2

The Enlightenment in Europe

MAIN IDEA

A revolution in intellectual activity changed Europeans' view of government and society.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Freedoms and some forms of government in many countries today are a result of Enlightenment thinking.

TERMS & NAMES

- Enlightenment
- social contract
- John Locke
- natural rights
- philosophe
- Voltaire
- Montesquieu
- separation of powers
- Jean Jacques Rousseau
- Mary Wollstonecraft

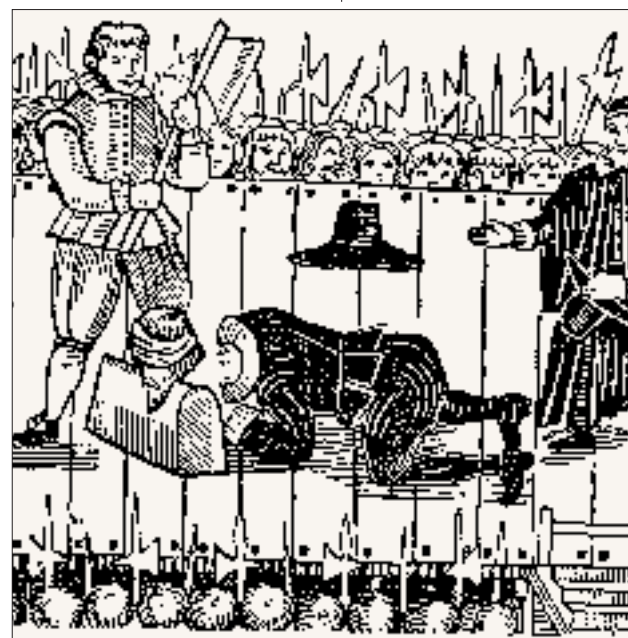
SETTING THE STAGE The influence of the Scientific Revolution soon spread beyond the world of science. Philosophers admired Newton because he had used reason to explain the laws governing nature. People began to look for laws governing human behavior as well. They hoped to apply reason and the scientific method to all aspects of society—government, religion, economics, and education. In this way, the ideas of the Scientific Revolution paved the way for a new movement called the **Enlightenment**, or the Age of Reason. This movement reached its height in the mid-1700s.

Two Views on Government

The Enlightenment started from some key ideas put forth by two English political thinkers of the 1600s, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Both men experienced the political turmoil of England early in that century. However, they came to very different conclusions about government and human nature.

Hobbes's Social Contract Thomas Hobbes expressed his views in a work called *Leviathan* (1651). The horrors of the English Civil War convinced him that all humans were naturally selfish and wicked. Without governments to keep order, Hobbes said, there would be “war of every man against every man.” In this state of nature, as Hobbes called it, life would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Hobbes argued that to escape such a bleak life, people gave up their rights to a strong ruler. In exchange, they gained law and order. Hobbes called this agreement, by which people created government, the **social contract**. Because people acted in their own self-interest, Hobbes said, the ruler needed total power to keep citizens under control. The best government was one that had the awesome power of a leviathan (sea monster). In Hobbes's view, such a government was an absolute monarchy, which could impose order and demand obedience.



This engraving depicts the beheading of Charles I. Hobbes developed his political ideas out of the violent events in England in the early 1600s.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Clarifying

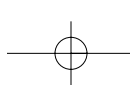
According to Hobbes, why would people want to live under the rule of an absolute monarch?

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Contrasting How does Locke's view of human nature differ from that of Hobbes?

Locke's Natural Rights The philosopher **John Locke** held a different, more positive, view of human nature. He believed that people could learn from experience and improve themselves. As reasonable beings, they had the natural ability to govern their own affairs and to look after the welfare of society. Locke criticized absolute monarchy and favored the idea of self-government.

According to Locke, all people are born free and equal, with three **natural rights**—life, liberty, and property. The purpose of government, said Locke, is to protect these rights. If a government fails to do so, citizens have a right to overthrow it. Locke



Changing Idea: The Right to Govern

Old Idea

A monarch's rule is justified by divine right.



New Idea

A government's power comes from the consent of the governed.

published his ideas in 1690, two years after the Glorious Revolution. His book, *Two Treatises on Government*, served to justify the overthrow of James II.

Locke's theory had a deep influence on modern political thinking. His statement that a government's power comes from the consent of the people is the foundation of modern democracy. The ideas of government by popular consent and the right to rebel against unjust rulers helped inspire struggles for liberty in Europe and the Americas.

HISTORY MAKERS



Voltaire
1694–1778

Voltaire corresponded with several European monarchs and nobles. Among them was the Prussian king Frederick II. At the king's invitation, Voltaire spent three years at Frederick's palace. At first, the two men seemed like ideal companions. Both were witty. Both cared nothing for appearances and dressed in shabby, rumpled clothes. Each friend paid the other elegant compliments.

Before long, however, the king and the philosophe got on each other's nerves. Voltaire disliked editing Frederick's mediocre poetry. Frederick suspected Voltaire of some shady business dealings. Eventually, Voltaire tried to sneak away, but Prussian soldiers captured him and made him spend the night in jail.

After returning to France, Voltaire described the Prussian king as "a nasty monkey, perfidious friend, [and] wretched poet." Frederick returned the abuse, calling Voltaire a "miser, dirty rogue, [and] coward."

The Philosophes Advocate Reason

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** (FIHL-uh-SAHFS), the French word for philosophers. The philosophes believed that people could apply reason to all aspects of life—just as Isaac Newton had applied reason to science. Five important concepts formed the core of their philosophy:

1. **Reason** Enlightened thinkers believed truth could be discovered through reason or logical thinking. Reason, they said, was the absence of intolerance, bigotry, or prejudice in one's thinking.
2. **Nature** The philosophes referred to nature frequently. To them, 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 of motion.
3. **Happiness** A person who lived by nature's laws would find happiness, the philosophes said. They were impatient with the medieval notion that people should accept misery in this world to find joy in the hereafter. The philosophes wanted well-being on earth, and they believed it was possible.
4. **Progress** The philosophes were the first Europeans to believe in progress for society. Now that people used a scientific approach, they believed, society and humankind could be perfected.
5. **Liberty** The philosophes envied the liberties that the English people had won in their Glorious Revolution and Bill of Rights. In France, there were many restrictions on speech, religion, trade, and personal travel. Through reason, the philosophes believed, society could be set free.

Voltaire Combats Intolerance Probably the most brilliant and influential of the philosophes was François Marie Arouet. Using the pen name **Voltaire**, he published more than 70 books of political essays, philosophy, history, fiction, and drama.

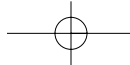
Voltaire often used satire against his opponents. He made frequent targets of the clergy, the aristocracy, and the government. His sharp tongue made him enemies at the French court, and twice he was sent to prison. After his second jail term, Voltaire was exiled to England for two years. There, Voltaire came to admire the English government much more than his own. After he returned to Paris,

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

C. Comparing How were the philosophes' views similar to Locke's?

Vocabulary

satire: irony, sarcasm, or wit used to attack folly, vice, or stupidity.



much of his work mocked the laws and customs of France. He even dared to raise doubts about the Christian religion. The French king and France's Catholic bishops were outraged. In 1734, fearing another unpleasant jail term, Voltaire fled Paris.

Although he made powerful enemies, Voltaire never stopped fighting for tolerance, reason, freedom of religious belief, and freedom of speech. He used his quill pen as if it were a deadly weapon in a thinker's war against humanity's worst enemies—intolerance, prejudice, and superstition. Such attitudes were, he said, *l'infâme*—infamous or evil things. He often ended his letters with a fighting slogan, "*Écrasez l'infâme!*" (ay-crah-ZAY lahn-FAM). The phrase meant "Crush the evil thing!"

Montesquieu and the Separation of Powers Another influential French writer, the Baron de **Montesquieu** (MAHN-tuh-SKYOO), devoted himself to the study of political liberty. An aristocrat and lawyer, Montesquieu studied the history of ancient Rome. He concluded that Rome's collapse was directly related to its loss of political liberties.

Like Voltaire, Montesquieu believed that Britain was the best-governed country of his own day. Here was a government, he thought, in which power was balanced among three groups of officials. The British king and his ministers held executive power. They carried out the laws of the state. The members of Parliament held legislative, or lawmaking, power. The judges of the English courts held judicial power. They interpreted the laws to see how each applied to a specific case. Montesquieu called this division of power among different branches **separation of powers**.

Montesquieu oversimplified the British system (it did not actually separate powers this way). His idea, however, became a part of his most famous book, *On the Spirit of Laws* (1748). In his book, Montesquieu proposed that separation of powers would keep any individual or group from gaining total control of the government. "Power," he wrote, "should be a check to power." Each branch of government would serve as a check on the other two. This idea later would be called "checks and balances."

Montesquieu's book was admired by political leaders in the British colonies of North America. His ideas about separation of powers and checks and balances became the basis for the United States Constitution.



"Power should be a check to power."

Baron de Montesquieu

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

D. Analyzing Issues

What advantages did Montesquieu see in the separation of powers?

Changing Idea: Government Powers

Old Idea

Monarch rules with absolute authority.



New Idea

Separation of government powers among executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

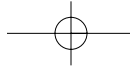
Rousseau: Champion of Freedom A third great philosophe, **Jean Jacques Rousseau** (roo-SOH), was passionately committed to individual freedom. The son of a poor Swiss watchmaker, Rousseau worked as an engraver, music teacher, tutor, and secretary. Eventually, Rousseau made his way to Paris and won recognition as a writer of essays. There he met and befriended other philosophes, although he felt out of place in the circles of Paris high society in which they traveled.

A strange, brilliant, and controversial figure, Rousseau strongly disagreed with other Enlightenment thinkers on many matters. Most philosophes believed that reason, science, and art would improve life for all people. Rousseau, however, argued that civilization corrupted people's natural goodness. "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains," he wrote. In the earliest times, according to Rousseau, people had lived as free and equal individuals in a primitive "state of nature." As people became civilized, however, the strongest among them forced everyone else to obey unjust laws. Thus, freedom and equality were destroyed.



"Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."

Jean Jacques Rousseau



Rousseau believed that the only good government was one that was freely formed by the people and guided by the “general will” of society—a direct democracy. Under such a government, people agree to give up some of their freedom in favor of the common good. In 1762, he explained his political philosophy in a book called *The Social Contract*.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The heart of the idea of the social contract may be stated simply: Each of us places his person and authority under the supreme direction of the general will, and the group receives each individual as an indivisible part of the whole. . . .

In order that the social contract may not be a mere empty formula, everyone must understand that any individual who refuses to obey the general will must be forced by his fellows to do so. This is a way of saying that it may be necessary to force a man to be free; freedom in this case being obedience to the will of all.

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU, *The Social Contract*

Rousseau’s view of the social contract differed greatly from that of Hobbes. For Hobbes, the social contract was an agreement between a society and its government. For Rousseau, it was an agreement among free individuals to create a society and a government.

Like Locke, Rousseau argued that legitimate government came from the consent of the governed. However, Rousseau believed in a much broader democracy than Locke had stood for. He argued that all people were equal and that titles of nobility should be abolished. Rousseau’s ideas inspired many of the leaders of the French Revolution who overthrew the monarchy in 1789.

Beccaria Promotes Criminal Justice An Italian philosophe named Cesare Bonesana Beccaria (BAYK-uh-REE-ah) turned his thoughts to the justice system. He believed that laws existed to preserve social order, not to avenge crimes. In his celebrated book *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764), Beccaria railed against common abuses of justice. They included torturing of witnesses and suspects, irregular proceedings in trials, and punishments that were arbitrary or cruel. He argued that a person accused of a crime should receive a speedy trial, and that torture should never be used. Moreover, he said, the degree of punishment should be based on the seriousness of the crime. He also believed that capital punishment should be abolished.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

E. Clarifying Where does authority rest, in Rousseau’s view of the social contract?

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

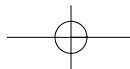
F. Summarizing What reforms did Beccaria recommend?

Major Ideas of the Enlightenment

Idea	Thinker	Impact
Natural rights—life, liberty, property	Locke	Fundamental to U.S. Declaration of Independence
Separation of powers	Montesquieu	France, United States, Latin American nations use separation of powers in new constitutions.
Freedom of thought and expression	Voltaire	Guaranteed in U.S. Bill of Rights and French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen; European monarchs reduce or eliminate censorship
Abolishment of torture	Beccaria	Guaranteed in U.S. Bill of Rights; torture outlawed or reduced in nations of Europe and the Americas
Religious freedom	Voltaire	Guaranteed in U.S. Bill of Rights and French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen; European monarchs reduce persecution
Women’s equality	Wollstonecraft	Women’s rights groups form in Europe and North America.

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

1. What important documents reflect the influence of Enlightenment ideas?
2. In your opinion, which are the two most important Enlightenment ideas? Support your answer with reasons.



Beccaria based his ideas about justice on the principle that governments should seek the greatest good for the greatest number of people. His ideas influenced criminal law reformers in Europe and North America.

Women and the Enlightenment

The philosophes challenged many assumptions about government and society. But they often took a traditional view toward women. Rousseau, for example, developed many progressive ideas about education. However, he believed that a girl's education should mainly teach her how to be a helpful wife and mother. Other male social critics scolded women for reading novels because they thought it encouraged idleness and wickedness. Still, some male writers argued for more education for women and for women's equality in marriage.

Women writers also tried to improve the status of women. In 1694, the English writer Mary Astell published *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*. Her book addressed the lack of educational opportunities for women. In later writings, she used Enlightenment arguments about government to criticize the unequal relationship between men and women in marriage. She wrote, "If absolute sovereignty be not necessary in a state, how comes it to be so in a family? . . . If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?"

During the 1700s, other women picked up these themes. Among the most persuasive was **Mary Wollstonecraft**, who published an essay called *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. In the essay, she disagreed with Rousseau that women's education should be secondary to men's. Rather, she argued that women, like men, need education to become virtuous and useful. Even if they are to be mothers, education will make them better mothers. Wollstonecraft also believed that women not only should be able to be nurses but also should be able to become doctors. She also argued for women's right to participate in politics.

Women made important contributions to the Enlightenment in other ways. In Paris and other European cities, wealthy women helped spread Enlightenment ideas through social gatherings called salons. (The importance of salons is discussed later in this chapter.)

One woman fortunate enough to receive education in the sciences was Emilie du Châtelet (shah-tlay). Du Châtelet was an aristocrat trained as a mathematician and physicist. By translating Newton's work from Latin into French, she helped stimulate interest in science in France.

Impact of the Enlightenment

Over a span of a few decades, Enlightenment writers challenged long-held ideas about society. They examined such principles as the divine right of monarchs, the union of church and state, and unequal social classes. They held these beliefs up to the light of reason and found them unreasonable.

The philosophes mainly lived in the world of ideas. They formed and popularized new theories. Although they encouraged European monarchs to make reforms, they were not active revolutionaries. However, their theories eventually inspired the American and French revolutions and other revolutionary movements in the 1800s. Enlightenment thinking produced three other long-term effects that helped shape Western civilization.

HISTORY MAKERS



Mary Wollstonecraft
1759–1797

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft argued that women deserved the same rights as men. "Let women share the rights and she will emulate [imitate] the virtues of men; for she must grow more perfect when emancipated," she wrote. The key to gaining equality and freedom, she argued, was better education.

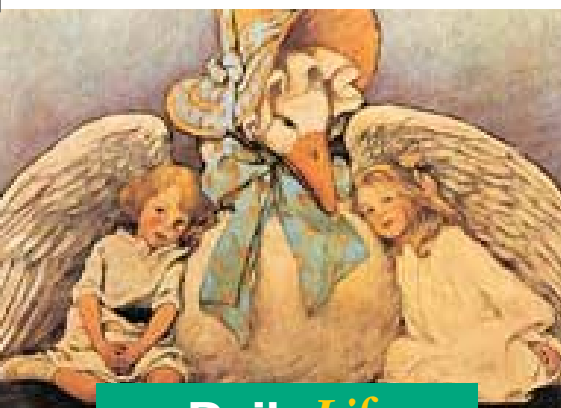
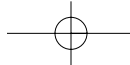
Wollstonecraft herself received little formal education. She and her two sisters taught themselves by studying books at home. With her sisters, she briefly ran a school. These experiences shaped her thoughts about education.

After joining a London publisher, Wollstonecraft met many leading radicals of the day. One of them was her future husband, the writer Richard Godwin. She died at age 38, after giving birth to their daughter, Mary. This child, whose married name was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, went on to write the classic novel *Frankenstein*.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

G. Drawing

Conclusions Why do you think the issue of education was important to both Astell and Wollstonecraft?



Daily Life

Attitudes Toward Children

Before the mid-1700s, people commonly believed that children were naturally sinful. Parents raised their children with a harsh hand and treated them like miniature adults.

During the Enlightenment, such attitudes changed. People believed children should be better educated and could be allowed to mature into adulthood. Parents lessened the use of corporal punishment and increased play time.

By 1780, there was a new market for rocking horses, jigsaw puzzles, and baby clothes. In Britain, the first Mother Goose book of nursery rhymes appeared. Books like *The Newtonian System of the Universe Digested for Young Minds* by Tom Telescope appeared in print. Children even began to get discount tickets to museums and curiosity shows.

Belief in Progress The first effect was a belief in progress. Pioneers such as Galileo and Newton had discovered the key for unlocking the mysteries of nature in the 1500s and 1600s. With the door thus opened, the growth of scientific knowledge seemed to quicken in the 1700s. Scientists made key new discoveries in chemistry, physics, biology, and mechanics. The successes of the Scientific Revolution gave people the confidence that human reason could solve social problems. Philosophes and reformers urged an end to the practice of slavery. They also argued for more social equality and improvements in education. Through reason, a better society was possible.

A More Secular Outlook A second outcome was the rise of a more secular, or worldly, outlook. During the Enlightenment, people began to openly question their religious beliefs and the teachings of the church. Before the Scientific Revolution, people accepted the mysteries of the universe as the mysteries of God. One by one, scientists discovered that these mysteries could be explained mathematically. Newton himself was a deeply religious man, and he sought to reveal God's majesty through his work. However, his findings caused some people to change the way they thought about God.

Voltaire and other critics attacked some of the beliefs and practices of organized Christianity. They wanted to rid religious faith of superstition and fear and promote tolerance of all religions.

Importance of the Individual Faith in science and in progress produced a third outcome—the rise of individualism. As people began to turn away from the church and royalty for guidance, they looked to themselves instead.

The philosophes encouraged people to use their own ability to reason in order to judge what is right or wrong. They also emphasized the importance of the individual in society. Government, they argued, was

formed by individuals to promote their welfare. The British thinker Adam Smith extended the emphasis on the individual to economic thinking. He believed that individuals acting in their own self-interest created economic progress. Smith's theory is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

During the Enlightenment, reason took center stage. The greatest minds of Europe followed each other's work with interest and often met to discuss their ideas. Some of the kings and queens of Europe were also very interested. As you will learn in Section 3, they sought to apply some of the philosophes' ideas to create progress in their countries.

Section 2 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Enlightenment
- social contract
- John Locke
- natural rights
- philosophe
- Voltaire
- Montesquieu
- separation of powers
- Jean Jacques Rousseau
- Mary Wollstonecraft

2. TAKING NOTES

In a chart like the one below, list the important ideas of Hobbes, Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Beccaria, and Wollstonecraft.

Thinker	Key Idea

Choose one of these thinkers and write a paragraph on how his or her ideas are influential today.

3. SYNTHESIZING

For each of the statements below, identify who said it and explain what it means. Then say how each viewpoint reflects Enlightenment ideas.

- "Power should be a check to power."
- "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."
- "Let women share the rights and she will emulate the virtues of men."

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Power and Authority

Compare the views of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau on government. How do their differing ideas reflect their understanding of human behavior?

THINK ABOUT

- how each philosopher viewed the "state of nature"
- what each considered the source of a government's authority

different PERSPECTIVES

European Values

Writers and artists of the Enlightenment often used satire to comment on European values. Using wit and humor, they ridiculed ideas and customs for the purpose of improving society. Satire allowed artists to explore human faults and failings in a way that is powerful but not preachy. In the two literary excerpts and the drawing below, notice how the writer or artist makes his point.

LITERATURE

Voltaire

Voltaire wrote *Candide* (1759) to attack a philosophy called Optimism, which held that all is right with the world. The hero of the story, a young man named Candide, encounters the most awful disasters and human evils as he travels far and wide. In this passage, Candide has met a slave in Surinam, a Dutch colony in South America. The slave explains why he is missing a leg and a hand.

“When we’re working at the sugar mill and catch our finger in the grinding-wheel, they cut off our hand. When we try to run away, they cut off a leg. I have been in both of these situations. This is the price you pay for the sugar you eat in Europe. . . .

“The Dutch fetishes [i.e., missionaries] who converted me [to Christianity] tell me every Sunday that we are all the sons of Adam, Whites and Blacks alike. I’m no genealogist, but if these preachers are right, we are all cousins born of first cousins. Well, you will grant me that you can’t treat a relative much worse than this.”

ENGRAVING

Francisco Goya

The Spanish artist Francisco Goya issued a series of 80 engravings called *Los Caprichos* (*Caprices*) in 1797. In them, he criticized a range of “human errors and evils” and also satirized Spanish politics and society. In the image shown here, titled “Out Hunting for Teeth,” Goya attacks superstition. He wrote this caption for the image:

The teeth of a man who has been hung are indispensable for casting a spell. Without this ingredient, nothing succeeds. A pity that people believe such nonsense.



LITERATURE

Jonathan Swift

The narrator of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), an English doctor named Lemuel Gulliver, takes four disastrous voyages that leave him stranded in strange lands. In the following passage, Gulliver tries to win points with the king of Brobdingnag—a land of giants—by offering to show him how to make guns and cannons. The reaction of the king, who is above such things, shows how Swift felt about the inhuman side of the human race.

[I told the king that] a proper quantity of this powder [gunpowder] rammed into a hollow tube of brass or iron . . . would drive a ball of iron or lead with such violence and speed, as nothing was able to sustain its force. That, the largest balls thus discharged, would not only destroy whole ranks of an army at once; but batter the strongest walls to the ground; sink down ships with a thousand men in each, to the bottom of the sea; and when linked together by a chain, would cut through masts and rigging; divide hundreds of bodies in the middle, and lay all waste before them. . . .

The king was struck with horror at the description I had given of those terrible engines. . . . He was amazed how so impotent and grovelling an insect as I (these were his expressions) could entertain such inhuman ideas, and in so familiar a manner as to appear wholly unmoved at all the scenes of blood and desolation, which I had painted as the common effects of those destructive machines; whereof, he said, some evil genius, enemy to mankind, must have been the first contriver [inventor].



Connect to History

Clarifying Write a statement that summarizes the main point each writer and artist is making. What techniques do they use to reinforce their messages?



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R3

Connect to Today

Writing Both Voltaire and Swift used a fictional travel narrative as a type of satire. Imagine you are an alien visitor to your school or community. Write a letter or a narrative that describes how the people you see think and behave.



CD-ROM

For another perspective on the Enlightenment, see World History: Electronic Library of Primary Sources.