

I. Path to the Enlightenment

- A.** The Enlightenment was an eighteenth-century philosophical movement built off the achievements of the Scientific Revolution. The Enlightenment philosophers hoped to make a better society by applying the scientific method and reason to social problems. They talked a lot about reason, natural law, hope, and progress.
- B.** Enlightenment philosophers thought that society was governed by natural laws just as the Newtonian physical universe was.
- C.** **John Locke's** theory of knowledge greatly influenced Enlightenment thinkers. He argued that people are born with a mind that is a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, and that knowledge comes to it through the five senses. This meant that the right influences could create a new kind of society by creating a new way of understanding.
- D.** Enlightenment thinkers hoped to discover with the scientific method the laws that all institutions should follow to produce the ideal society.

II. Philosophes and Their Ideas

- A.** The Enlightenment intellectuals were called by the French name **philosophe** (“philosopher”). Most were writers, professors, economists, journalists, and social reformers.
- B.** The ideas of the philosophes influenced the entire Western world. To them ideas were to change the world by the rational criticism of beliefs in all areas, including religion and politics. The three greatest French philosophes were Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot.
- C.** Charles-Louis de Secondat, the Baron de **Montesquieu**, studied governments to find the natural laws governing social and political relationships. He published his ideas in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). He identified three kinds of government: republics, despotism, and monarchies.
- D.** His analysis of the English monarchy is his most lasting contribution. He argued that the government functioned through a **separation of powers** controlled by checks and balances. This structure gives the greatest freedom and security for the state. Montesquieu's ideas influenced the American framers of the Constitution.
- E.** The greatest figure of the Enlightenment was the prolific writer François-Marie Arouet, known simply as **Voltaire**. He wrote pamphlets, plays, novels, letters, essays, and histories.
- F.** Voltaire was best known for his criticism of Christianity and his belief in religious toleration. He championed **deism**, an eighteenth-century religious philosophy based on reason and natural law. Deists believe the world is like a clock that God created and set according to his natural laws, and then let run without his intervention.
- G.** **Denis Diderot's** most important contribution to the Enlightenment was the *Encyclopedia, or Classified Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Trades*. He edited this 28-volume collection of knowledge, published in 1751, to “change the general way of thinking.” Many of its articles attacked old French society and argued for religious toleration and social improvements to make society more humane. The *Encyclopedia* spread the ideas of the Enlightenment.

III. Toward a New Social Science

- A.** The Enlightenment's belief that the methods of the Scientific Revolution and Newton could discover the natural laws of society led to the creation of what we call the social sciences, such as economics and political science.
- B.** The French Physiocrats and Scottish philosopher Adam Smith founded modern economics. The Physiocrats believed that if people were free to pursue their economic self-interest, all society would benefit. They developed the doctrine of **laissez-faire** (“to let [people] do [what they want]”), which argued that the government should not interfere with natural economic processes by imposing regulations.
- C.** **Adam Smith** gave the best expression of this approach to economics in his famous work *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith said the government had only three legitimate functions: protecting society from invasion (army), defending citizens from injustice (police), and maintaining public works like roads and canals that private individuals could not afford.
- D.** For centuries punishments for crimes had often been quite cruel. One reason was that extreme punishment was necessary to deter crime in a time when the police force was too weak to ensure that criminals would be captured.

E. In 1764 the philosophe Cesare Beccaria argued in his essay *On Crimes and Punishments* that punishments should not be exercises in brutality. He also argued against capital punishment, finding it absurd because the state murders to punish a murderer.

IV. The Later Enlightenment

A. A new generation of philosophes emerged by the 1760s. **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** was the most famous. In his *Discourse on the Origins of the Inequality of Mankind*, he argued that people formed governments and laws to protect their private property, but the government relationship enslaved them. In *The Social Contract* (1762) he presented the idea of a **social contract** in which members of society agree to be governed by the general will, which represents what is best for society as a whole.

B. In his novel *Emile*, Rousseau argued that education should nurture, not restrict, children's natural instincts. Unlike many Enlightenment thinkers, he believed that emotions, as well as reason, were important to human development.

C. Critics have accused Rousseau of not practicing what he preached. His children were sent to dangerous orphanages, and he believed women were naturally subservient to men.

V. Rights of Women

A. **Mary Wollstonecraft** is considered the founder of the European and American movement for women's rights. She argued that women were as rational as men and as capable of being responsible free citizens.

B. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Wollstonecraft identified two problems with the beliefs of many Enlightenment thinkers. Those who argued men should rule women also argued against government based on the arbitrary power of kings. Power of men over women was equally wrong. She also argued that because women are rational beings, they should have the same rights as men—in educational, economic, and political life.

VI. Social World of the Enlightenment

A. The Enlightenment ideas were most known among the urban upper class. They spread among the literate elite. Literacy and the availability of books were increasing greatly during the eighteenth century. Many titles were aimed at the new, middle-class reading public, which included women and urban artisans.

B. Magazines for the general public developed during this time. The daily newspaper did as well. The first was printed in **London** in 1702.

C. Enlightenment ideas also spread at the **salon**. Salons were gatherings in the elegant homes of the wealthy. The guests took part in conversations, often about the new philosophical ideas. Nobles, thinkers, artists, and government officials attended these salons. Some became very famous. The women who hosted them could sway political opinion and influence literary and artistic taste.

VII. Religion in the Enlightenment

A. Most of the philosophes attacked the Christian churches, but most Europeans of the time were devout believers. The desire of ordinary Protestants for a greater depth of religious experience led to new religious movements.

B. One new religious movement was Methodism. **John Wesley** had a mystical experience in which “the gift of God's grace” assured him of salvation. He became a missionary to bring the “glad tidings” of salvation.

C. He preached to masses in open fields in England and appealed most to the lower classes. His sermons often caused people to have conversion experiences. Many Methodists helped each other do good works, which gave to the lower and middle classes a sense of purpose. Methodists stressed the importance of hard work.

D. Methodists played an important role in abolishing the slave trade in the early 1800s.

E. After Wesley's death, Methodism became a separate Protestant group.