



# THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

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*What comes to mind when you consider  
this word?*

**ENLIGHTENMENT**





“If there is  
something you  
know,  
communicate it.  
If there is  
something you  
don't know, search  
for it.”



# THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

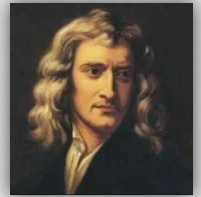
- ❑ In the seventeenth century, the **Scientific Revolution** had provided a new model for solving problems through rational thought and experimentation (**secular**), rather than on the authority of religion (**theological**.)

## Rene Descartes



- French philosopher, mathematician and scientist who saw man's ability to reason as the very proof of his existence
- "I think, therefore I am," *Discourse on Method*, 1637
- Descartes rejected all forms of intellectual authority except the conclusions of his own thought, which he then used to prove the existence of God.

## Sir Isaac Newton



- This revolution culminated in the seventeenth century with the publication of Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia* in 1687, in which a thoroughly mechanical universe was explained through universal laws of motion.
- Newton, like Descartes, presented a vision of the universe whose most basic workings could be calculated and understood rationally, but which was also the work of a Creator.
- The triumph of Newtonian science coincided with and helped to produce a fundamental intellectual change.

# REASON PROVIDES A UNIFYING DOCTRINE

- Science and rational inquiry now came to be seen as the common ground which reunited men, previously polarized into Catholic or Protestant, in what the Declaration of Independence would call “the pursuit of happiness.”
- With the right use of reason, all society’s problems could be solved and all mankind could live prosperously and contentedly.
- This optimism reflected a sense of growing economic opportunity - Europe in the eighteenth century was richer and more populous than ever before.
- Steady economic growth seemed to bear out the notion that the new key of scientific method could unlock the answers not only to the physical world (as Newton had done), but to theology, history, politics and social problems as well.
- Using the advances made possible through rational scientific inquiry, farmers pioneered improvements in agriculture and entrepreneurs experimented with new technologies and products.

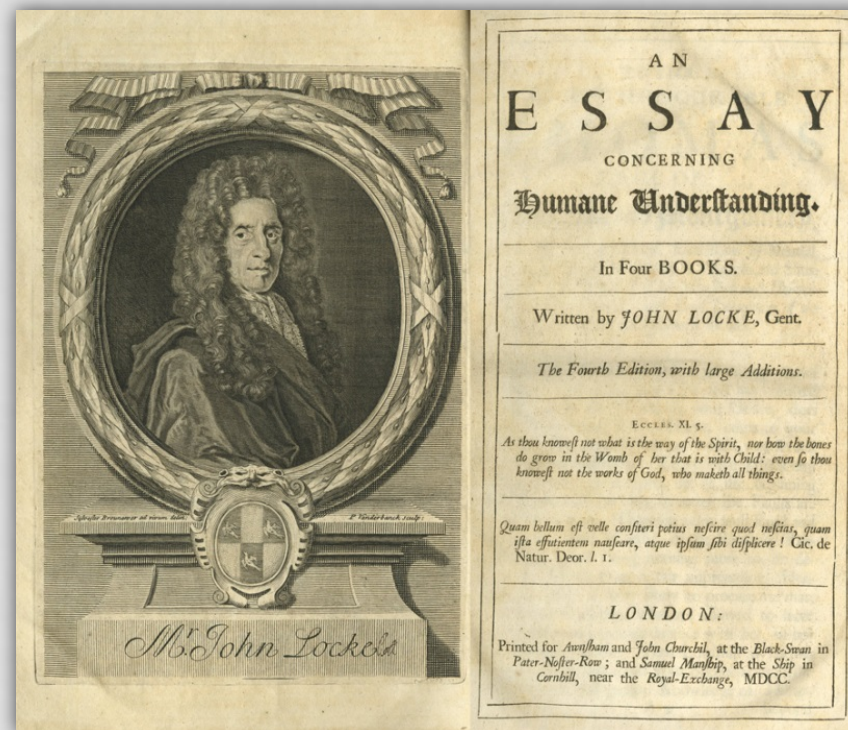
# THE ENLIGHTENMENT

- **How does one make mankind happy and rational and free?**
  - ❖ Their basic answer was: by discovering the underlying laws which would organize all knowledge into a clear, rational system, enabling individuals to become enlightened, and the societies in which they live to progress.
  - ❖ It was a goal seen as obtainable to the people of the eighteenth century.
- **Science and reason seemed to offer the key to the future, to a kind of paradise which would be realized not in the next world, as the theologians asserted, but in this world, here and now.**



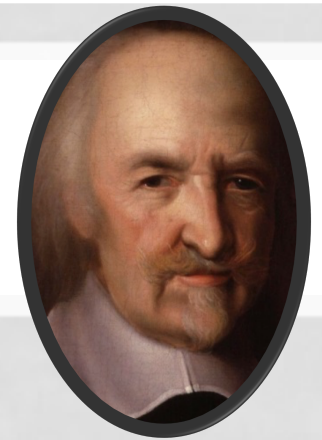
# ENGLAND: HOBBS & LOCKE

- Two English intellectuals, mathematician **Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)** and philosopher **John Locke (1632-1704)**, were among the first to use a scientific approach to study man and his society.



# THOMAS HOBBS

## (1588-1679)



- A mathematician, Hobbes' political theory was an effort to make politics into an exact science like geometry.
- Hobbes was an admirer of **Galileo's** ideas concerning the nature of the physical world and his studies of motion. Hobbes attempted to apply Galileo's scientific principles to social theory, reasoning that only matter exists, and that human behavior could be predicted by exact, scientific laws.
- Hobbes had also been influenced by the English Civil War (1642-1649, when the King Charles I was executed), which he believed was evidence that men were ultimately selfish and competitive.
- Hobbes wrote the *Leviathan* in 1651.
  - *Leviathan* attempted to turn politics into a science, arguing that men could be predicted with mathematical accuracy, and thus regulated.
  - According to the writing of Hobbes, men were motivated primarily by the desire for power and by fear of other men, and thus needed an all-powerful sovereign to rule over them.

# JOHN LOCKE

## 1632-1704



- A generation later the philosopher John Locke developed an entirely different notion of the basic nature of humankind, which he saw as innately good.
- Locke was a friend of **Sir Isaac Newton**, and was influenced by Newton's description of the universe as a vast machine operating by precise, unvarying scientific laws.
- Locke, who witnessed the almost bloodless, "**Glorious Revolution**" in England became convinced that people could live amicably together, after discovering God's law through the application of reason.
- In Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), he outlined a theory of politics based on people's natural rights: life, liberty, and the ownership of property.
- To Locke, the task of the state was to protect these rights: Government was a contract between ruler and subjects; rulers were granted power in order to assure their subjects welfare.
- His writings were seminal for the American revolutionary leader **Thomas Jefferson**, who closely followed Locke's ideas in the *Declaration of Independence*.

# FRANCE: THE PHILOSOPHES

- In the early eighteenth century, many French thinkers (known as the **Philosophes**) had come to admire England due to its advances in economics and its unique form of representative government.
- Many Philosophes built upon the ideas and analytical method employed by Locke, and attempted to develop theories of government based on a rational approach to man's relationship with the society in which he lived.
- Philosophes held three basic tenants:
  1. **Human society is governed by Natural Laws.**
  2. **These Natural Laws can be discovered by rational men.**
  3. **Human society can turn from traditional, authoritarian forms, & progress toward a more perfect government through rational thought.**



# CHARLES DE SECONDAT, THE BARON DE MONTESQUIEU (1689-1755)

- In the first generation of French Philosophes, one of the most important contributions to Enlightenment political thought was made by Montesquieu.
- Montesquieu came to respect the British political system of limited constitutional monarchy after a stay in England from 1729-1731.
- He also was influenced by Locke's *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (1690), in which Locke articulated his support for the government which was created by the revolution.
- In his masterwork *The Spirit of the Laws*, published in 1748, he developed the notion that human, natural and divine laws guide all things, including forms of government, and can best be discovered by empirical investigation.



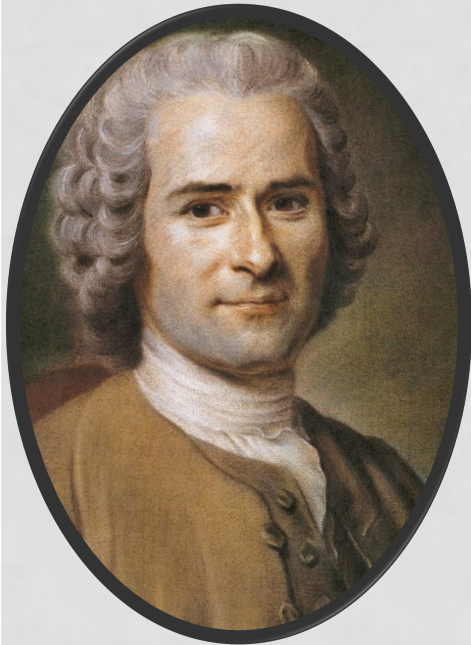


# VOLTAIRE (1694-1778)



- Voltaire was famous in his younger days for his poetry and plays, but after personal troubles forced him into exile in England in 1726, he came into contact with the ideas of Locke and Newton, and took up weightier concerns.
- England became for him a model of religious and philosophical freedom, and greatly affected the course of his work, culminating with the publication of his *Philosophical Letters Concerning the English Nation* in 1733, in which he praised the customs and institutions of English life.
- In his native France, Voltaire's work was seen as a direct rebuke to French mores and government, and after being condemned by local authorities, Voltaire was once again forced to flee abroad.
- In 1749, **Frederick the Great of Prussia**, who admired Voltaire's political views, invited him to come to his court in Potsdam as his royal writing teacher.
- After three years of what Voltaire saw as "intellectual tyranny" by the monarch, however, he fled to freer circumstances, settling for some time in Switzerland and eventually returning to Paris, to a hero's welcome, at the end of his life in 1778.

# ROUSSEAU (1712-1778)



- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, born a generation later, continued the Philosophe tradition .
- He was an outspoken critic of the French social and political order.
- In his landmark work, *The Social Contract*, written in 1762, Rousseau rejected existing forms of government in favor of a community based on the choice of all its citizens, and their democratic participation in every major decision.
- These ideas were to be of central importance after the outbreak of the French Revolution.

# THE ENLIGHTENMENT SPREADS

- The Enlightenment was a cosmopolitan movement, not restricted to England and France.
- In Germany, Italy and Spain, thinkers similar to the French Philosophes pursued their campaign against outmoded ideas and political and religious obscurantism.
- In colonial America, men like **Benjamin Franklin** (1706-1790), corresponded with European thinkers on political and scientific topics.
- Through Franklin and **Thomas Jefferson**, to name only the most prominent, the critical, rationalist thought of eighteenth-century Europe exercised a decisive influence on American political and social theories.
- The ***Declaration of Independence***(1776) is one of the clearest and most succinct articulations of the Enlightenment program to be penned in the entire eighteenth century.



# AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

- Influenced by the 18th-century European Enlightenment, and its own native American Philosophy, the **American Enlightenment** applied scientific reasoning to politics, science, and religion, promoted religious tolerance, and restored literature, the arts, and music as important disciplines and professions worthy of study in colleges.
- American Enlightenment produced the American Revolution, the writing of the Declaration of Independence, the creation of the American Republic under the United States Constitution of 1787, the Bill of Rights in 1790, as well as the development American government throughout the early 1800s.
- The foremost representatives of the American Enlightenment included political thinkers such as John Adams, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

# AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

- Enlightened thinkers typically valued **equality, liberty** and **personal rights**.
- Denouncing the British government for not giving equal rights to the colonies, **Thomas Jefferson**, strongly influenced by **Locke's Second Treatise**, famously called for the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in the **Declaration of Independence**.
- **James Madison** borrowed straight from the ideas of enlightenment when he included certain freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly in the **Bill of Rights**.
- The authors of the **U.S. Constitution** used the ideas of a social contract when setting up the U.S. government, and they were influenced by philosophers such as **Rousseau, Locke** and **Montesquieu**.
  - Enlightened American thinkers questioned the absolute **authority of church and state**, and despised the constant power struggle between the two.
  - The church, they believed, should not bar people from happiness in this life.
  - They thought that a government that was chosen by the people should act in the best interests of those people, or else be overthrown.
  - The U.S. government was thus divided into three branches, an idea borrowed directly from Montesquieu in an attempt to create a system of checks and balances.



# SOURCES

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