

The Enlightenment

TERMS & NAMES

Enlightenment
natural rights
philosophie
salon

Build on What You Know Have you ever questioned other people's ideas or beliefs? Well, that's what scientists did during the Scientific Revolution. And that's what philosophers would do during the period known as the Enlightenment.

Beginnings of the Enlightenment

1 ESSENTIAL QUESTION Why did the Enlightenment begin?

Scientists found new truths about nature by experimenting and using reason. So philosophers began using reason to seek truths about human nature. Because they wanted to enlighten, or shine a light on, this new way of finding out about the world came to be called the **Enlightenment**. The period also is known as the Age of Reason. The Enlightenment gained so much force in the mid-1700s that it destroyed old beliefs and led to lasting changes in society and government.

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Oxford University
Oxford University, in England, was attended by Enlightenment thinker John Locke in the 1600s. ▼

Roots of the Enlightenment The respect for reason can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Scholars in these classical cultures gained knowledge through observation, logic, and reasoning. They also believed in the worth of the individual.

As Christianity spread during the Middle Ages, faith became more important than reason. But Christianity did introduce the idea that all people were equal in the eyes of God. Equality became a key feature of Enlightenment thought.

Scholars rediscovered the writings of Greece and Rome during the Renaissance. Once again, a person's ability to reason and the importance of the individual were valued. Later, the Reformation appeared to approve the right of an individual to challenge the authority of the Catholic Church to put itself between God and a believer.



Lesson 3***Student Handout 3.1*****Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)**Education:

University of Oxford, England.

Early Life:

Hobbes was born in England. He did much traveling through France and Italy. During his travels, he met the astronomer Galileo and the French philosopher René Descartes. Hobbes was worried about being arrested by the government of England because of his beliefs, so he moved to France for eleven years. He worked as a scientist, philosopher, and math tutor.

Beliefs:

Hobbes is known as one of the first modern Western thinkers. He believed that religion should be separate from politics. He supported a strong government based on reason. Hobbes also tried to separate knowledge from faith, which eventually got him into trouble with the British Parliament. He was the first philosopher to emphasize reason instead of religious faith. Hobbes' major belief was that all people are fearful and predatory (greedy). As a result, they must submit to the absolute power of the state. By allowing the state to have absolute power, the people would live by reason and gain lasting preservation.

Lesson 3***Student Handout 3.2*****John Locke (1632-1704)**Education:

Christ Church College, University of Oxford, England.

Early Life:

Locke was born in England. His father fought in the English Civil war on the Parliament side. His father's views about the people's role in government influenced Locke's views.

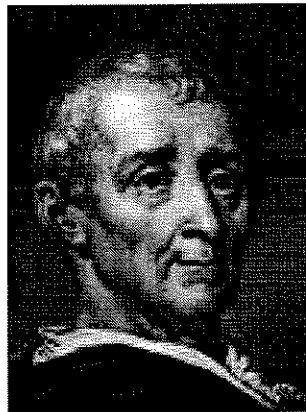
Beliefs:

He disagreed with Thomas Hobbes about human nature. Hobbes felt all people were selfish. Locke believed that all people were born good and were given natural rights by God. These were rights to life, liberty, and owning property. Locke believed that the king's power should be limited by laws enacted by the people. This type of government is called a constitutional monarchy.

He argued that the agreement between the government and the people was a social contract. If the government did not uphold its part and protect the people's rights, the people should revolt.

Freedom of religion was a right that the government should protect. People should be allowed to choose which church to attend.

These ideas were used by American colonists in 1776 as a reason for the American revolution, and they helped shape the US Constitution. The ideas also influenced the French revolution in 1789.

Lesson 3***Student Handout 3.4*****Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755)**Education:

College of Juilly, France.

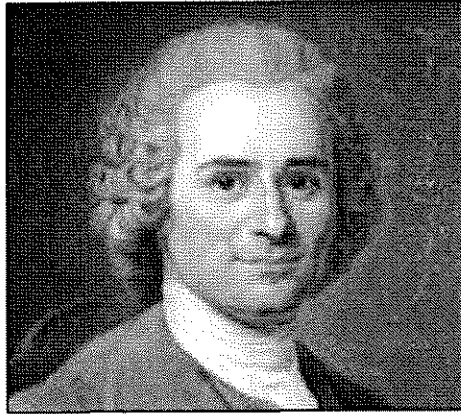
Early Life:

He was born in France. His uncle died in 1714 and left Montesquieu his riches and his title. He became a lawyer and was famous as a writer who criticized the French king and the Catholic Church. His most famous book was *The Spirit of Laws*. It explained how the government should be organized.

Beliefs:

He agreed with Locke in many ways about the role of government. Montesquieu admired the system in England that limited the power of the king. He said the government should be broken into different sections and that each should have some power to control the others. He wanted government to split into three branches. One branch would make laws, another would interpret the laws, and the third would enforce the laws. This system is called separation of powers, and was the model for the US government.

One of the most important ideas from his system is that each branch has some control over another branch. For example, the legislature makes laws, but the head of state (president) enforces them. Montesquieu believed this system would prevent a leader from becoming a tyrant.

Lesson 3***Student Handout 3.5*****Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)****Education:**

Self-educated; also served an apprenticeship as engraver and notary.

Early Life:

He was born in Geneva, Switzerland. His mother died when he was born, so he was raised by an aunt. When Rousseau turned thirteen, he worked as an apprentice for an engraver but ran away after three years. He became a secretary for a wealthy woman, who subsequently had much influence on his life. He moved to Paris where he became a music teacher.

Beliefs:

He believed that individuals should have certain rights. His ideas supported the French revolution. Rousseau felt that whatever the majority of the people wanted should become law. Rousseau's ideas of individual freedom spread throughout Europe and the United States. He was against the absolute power or control of the Church and government, and he believed that the government should do what the majority of the people wanted. He also argued that if the people were in control, then the rules should be strictly enforced. Rousseau felt that education needed to be changed. He believed that children should be allowed to show their emotions in order to become well-rounded and freethinking individuals. Rousseau supported the ideals of the Enlightenment by defending the importance of reason and individual rights. Individuals, according to Rousseau, should be allowed to experience and explore life.

Lesson 3***Student Handout 3.8*****Voltaire (1694-1778)**Education:

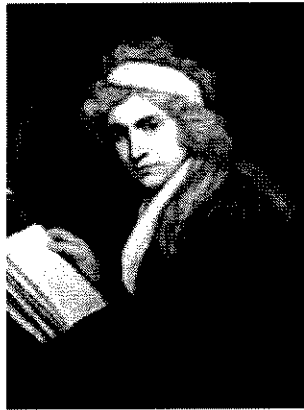
Jesuit College Louis-le-Grand, France.

Early Life:

Voltaire was born in Paris, France. He began to make friends with wealthy aristocrats in Paris. He became a writer because of his ability to make sarcastic jokes. He was sent to prison for eleven months because he made a political cartoon of one of the French government leaders. He continued to ridicule political leaders and was thrown in prison a second time. In order to get out of prison, he had to promise to leave France, so he went to England.

Beliefs:

Voltaire is often described as generous, enthusiastic, sentimental, and often distrustful. He felt that all things must be explained logically and reasonably. He fought against intolerance, tyranny, and superstition. He believed in freedom of thought and respect for all individuals. Most importantly, he believed that religion was too powerful and defended individuals who suffered because of their beliefs. He was against any form of religion that was too strict and did not accept the view of others, even though he did believe in God. He thought literature could be used to help understand the problems of the day.

Lesson 3***Student Handout 3.9*****Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)****Education:**

She was self-educated.

Early Life:

Mary was born in England. She was the second child of seven in a middle-class family. Her father was known to be abusive and harsh to the family. Mary tried to leave the family and to support herself, but she found she was limited in the types of jobs she could get because she was female. She worked as a companion and teacher. She was called back home to take care of her younger sisters and sick mother.

Beliefs:

Mary was not the first woman to recognize the inequalities between men and women during her lifetime, but she became the most popular. While she focused on fighting for the rights of women and against the inequalities in education, she also worked for the equal treatment of all human beings. She emphasized that education for men and women should be based on reason. Mary believed that people should be judged based on individual merit and moral virtue, not on gender. She wrote two books that discussed women's rights. Mary wanted men to treat their wives as equals, not as property. She also strongly urged that women be given equal opportunity when trying to get a job.