

## The Enlightenment (Age of Reason)

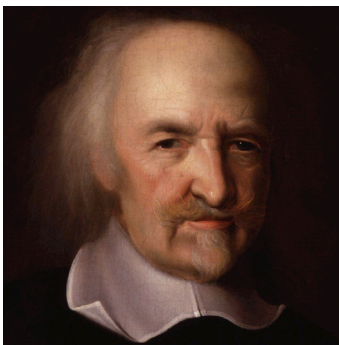
The Enlightenment was a time of great intellectual change and advancement. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. European philosophers, scientists, and other thinkers asked new and often radical questions about the world around them. They rejected traditional ideas supported by the Christian church and instead focus on people's ability to understand the world through reason. People, Enlightenment philosophers argued, had the ability to observe an ordered world.

Along with a renewed focus on reason came fresh ideas about the abilities of the individual. Enlightenment thinkers often argued that people were born with **natural rights**, or basic human rights, such as freedom. Unlike many earlier philosophers, Enlightenment thinkers claimed that the individual was important and that individual rights were necessary. However, they also acknowledged that people and places varied. Different societies might benefit from different political or social practices. Enlightenment ideas helped shape significant changes in the way people related to their governments in years to come.

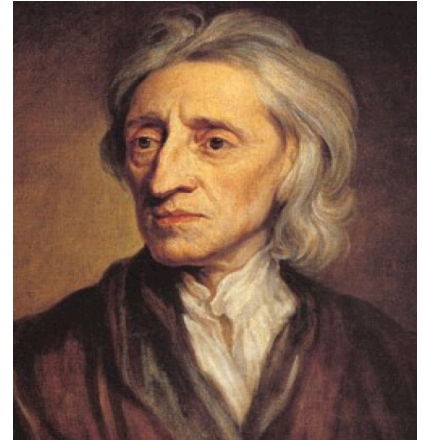
The thinkers of the Enlightenment based their ideas around two fundamental concepts, rationalism and individualism. **Rationalism** is the idea that people can use reason, or logical thought, to understand and improve the world. Rationalists believed that they could analyze and understand patterns in the behaviors of people and governments. They believed that individuals and governments should make decisions based on clear reasoning rather than superstition or tradition. **Individualism** is the idea that individuals and their rights are important. Individualists argued that individuals should be able to see how government helps them and governments should protect individual's interests. Using rational arguments, some Enlightenment thinkers argued that the people should have a larger role in government. Many advocated for more democratic systems.

Enlightenment philosophers applied these ideas to government, society, and human behavior. They argued that by using reason and science, people could study the nature of the human individual and could understand the causes of problems facing their society. Instead of simply accepting social problems, enlightenment thinkers tried to solve them. Eventually the Enlightenment led to conflict because it threatened important social traditions, including religious beliefs.

One of the earliest thinkers who tried to look at politics in a rational way was Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) from England. He believed that people were naturally aggressive and that conflict was a normal part of human nature. In his most famous book, *Leviathan*, Hobbes wrote that people could only escape war and violence by giving up their natural rights and submitting to the rule of a strong ruler. Hobbes called this agreement in which people gave up rights in exchange for law and order a **social contract**. Because of this negative view of human nature, Hobbes supported powerful rulers more than the rights of individuals.



John Locke (1632-1704), another important English philosopher at this time, had a very different view of human nature. He believed that people were not born good or evil, but that their characters were determined by their life experiences. In his most well-known political work, *Two Treatises on Government*, Locke wrote that people were born free and that they naturally had certain rights. The most important of these rights were life, liberty, and property. Locke agreed with Hobbes that governments were formed through social contract, but he saw the purpose of government very differently. Locke wrote that the purpose of government was to protect natural rights. The only reason people should give up any of these rights was in exchange for a just, or fair government. According to Locke's idea of a social contract, if a government did not rule justly, or did not protect people's rights, the people had a right to overthrow their leaders.

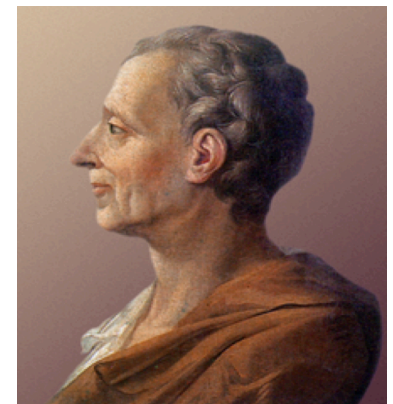


In the mid 1700's, the most important Enlightenment thinkers lived in Paris, France. This group of thinkers is known as the **philosophes**, which is the French word for philosophers. One of the most influential philosophes was Francois Marie Arouet, who wrote using the name Voltaire (1694-1778).

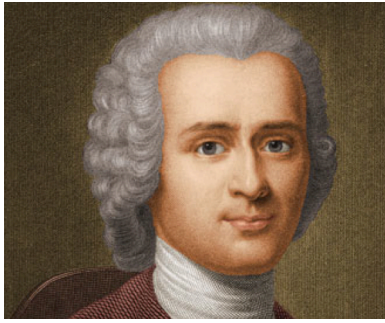


Voltaire's written works included plays, poems, and historical and philosophical essays. He was well known for using humor to make his political points. He was well known for using humor to make his political points. Voltaire wrote in favor of religious tolerance and free speech, and he often criticized important people in society. As a young man, Voltaire was arrested and put in jail for writing verses that made fun of government leaders. He also criticized church leaders and supported the separation of church and state. Voltaire's most famous work is a humorous novel called *Candide*, in which he made fun of the attitudes of other philosophers of his day.

Charles-Louis de Secondat, the Baron de Montesquieu (simply referred to as Montesquieu), wrote extensively about politics. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu (1689-1755) wrote about factors that would create a fair, uncorrupt government that protected people's rights. He believed that the way to achieve this goal was to have a **separation of power** so that no one person had too much influence. Montesquieu wanted governments divided into three different branches: a legislative branch, an executive branch, and a judicial branch. Each branch should have different responsibilities. The authors of the U.S. Constitution used this model for the U.S. government.



Another French philosophe, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), wrote about politics in a work called *The Social Contract*. In Rousseau's ideal society, people would be able to vote on the laws they must follow rather than merely obeying laws imposed on them by a ruler or rulers. While Rousseau supported democracy, he also wrote about other topics. These included how children should be educated and the benefits of spending time in nature. Rousseau believed that human beings are inherently good, but are corrupted by the evils of society. He considered science, art and social institutions to be a part of what corrupts. He believed that the only way to get back to that goodness that human beings are born with is to be as close to nature as possible.



Although some European rulers opposed Enlightenment ideas and tried to **cancel** these writers and others tried to put their ideas into practice. Frederick II, ruler of Prussia, a German state, even invited Voltaire to stay with him at court for a time. Frederick II—known also as Frederick the Great because of his military victories—was considered an “enlightened despot.” This term means that he used enlightenment ideas to create some legal reforms but never took actions that threatened his own power or significantly changed the structure of his society. A **despot** is someone who rules with unlimited power.

Enlightenment ideas flowed from France, across Europe, and beyond. Everywhere, thinkers examined traditional beliefs and customs in the light of reason and found them flawed. In time, they would inspire some Europeans to rise up against their rulers.

1 – 8. Write one of the **bold, underlined** words from the reading next to its synonym or definition:

Word from reading	Synonym/Definition
1.	A group of French thinkers from the 18 <sup>th</sup> Century.
2.	Suppress the information of...
3.	A belief that opinions and actions should be based on reason.
4.	Dividing government responsibilities into different branches.
5.	A ruler with unlimited power.
6.	A theory favoring freedom of action for individuals.
7.	An implicit agreement between people and government.
8.	Basic human rights that people are born with.

9–13. Match each philosopher's written work with the name of the philosopher who created it.

Book written	Philosopher who wrote it
9. <i>Two Treatises on Government</i>	
10. <i>The Social Contract</i>	
11. <i>The Spirit of the Laws</i>	
12. <i>Leviathan</i>	
13. <i>Candide</i>	

14-20. Answer the following questions based on the reading:

14. Comprehension: How did the new way of thinking (the dawn of enlightenment) affect traditional views supported by the Christian church?

15. Comprehension: How were the Enlightenment philosophers different from earlier philosophers?

16. Prediction: How do you think the ideas of rationalism and individualism lead to revolutions (the overthrowing of government) with the American colonies and the French?

17. Comprehension: From the reading, which 2 philosophers were from England?

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18. Comprehension: From the reading, which 3 philosophers were from France?

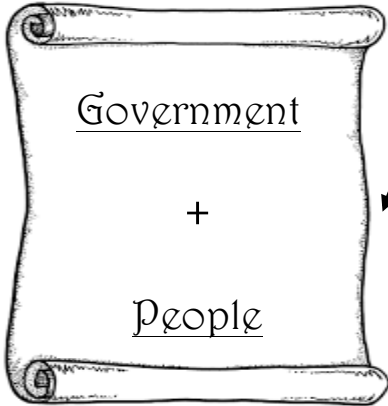
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19. Opinion: Which of the 5 Enlightenment philosophers from the reading do you think has the most important idea about how government should rule? Why?

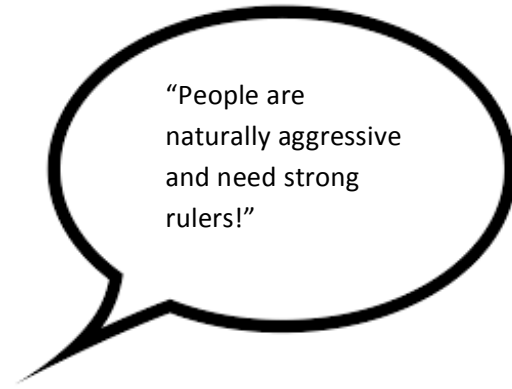
20. Opinion: Which of the 5 Enlightenment philosophers from the reading do you not agree with or you think has the least important idea about how government should rule? Why?

21-25. Match each picture of Enlightenment ideas to the philosopher that created it. Use the reading to help you decide.

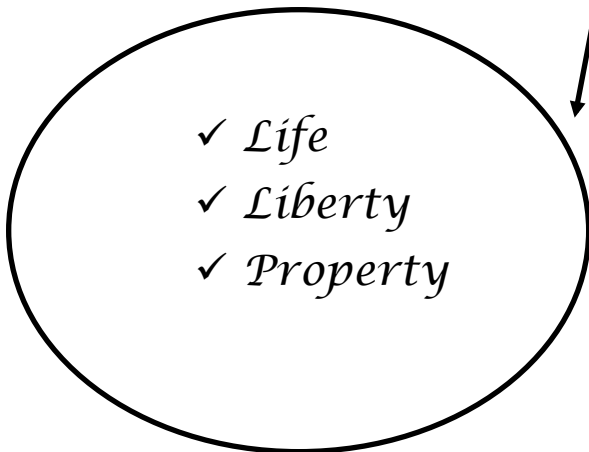
21. Philosopher:



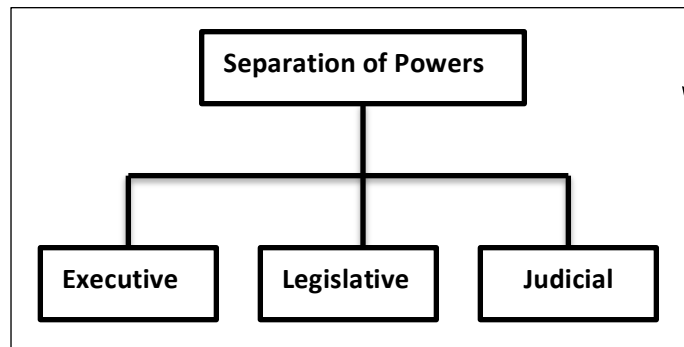
22. Philosopher:



23. Philosopher:



24. Philosopher:



25. Philosopher:

