

The Enlightenment

Definition: The European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries emphasizing reason, science, and individualism (rather than tradition and revelation) as the primary sources of truth and as the catalyst to human flourishing. This epoch is also known in intellectual history as the “Modern Era” or the “Age of Reason.”

Why is it called the Enlightenment?

Humanity was progressing away from the authority, tradition, and religious superstition (i.e. Christianity) of the “Dark Ages” and into the *light* of an age of unbridled human progress.

What led to the Enlightenment?

-The Renaissance in the 14th -17th centuries led to the rise of the liberal arts called “humanism.” It was a “rebirth” (what the French word, “*renaissance*” means) of classical learning. The Renaissance focused on studying the classics of ancient Greece and Rome, going back to the original sources of classical learning (“*ad fontes*”), and proliferation of the arts.

-The Reformation had weakened the stranglehold of the Roman Catholic Church on society. But the radical strictness of Protestant orthodoxy was seen as too legalistic and depressing. People wanted to move away from the Catholic Church but not toward the confines of Protestant morality.

-Europeans were tired of all the wars and fighting between Protestants and Catholics. From their perspective, Christianity had led to nothing but authoritarian warfare.

-New innovations in science and philosophy.

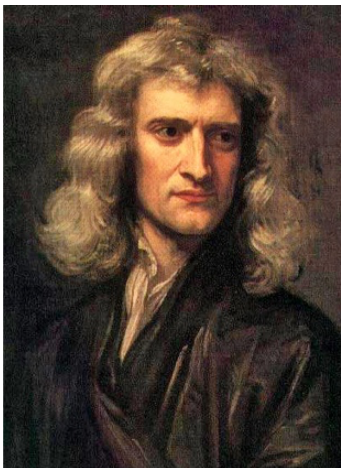
Worldview in the Pre-Modern, Modern, and Post-Modern era

	Pre-Modern Era	Modern Era (Enlightenment)	Post-Modern Era
Truth	Objective: Revealed by God	Objective: Reasoned to or discovered in science	Not objective: Only an attempt to gain power
Approach	Supernatural	Rational	Nonrational
Authority	Church/Tradition	Reason	None
Humanity	Corporate	Individual	Undefinable
Highest Subject of Study	Theology	Science	Sociology and Politics: Power Structures
Highest Value	God	Humanity	Self

Select major players and how they contributed to the worldview of the modern era.

Note: The following thinkers are some of the greatest geniuses in world history. I cannot go into everything they taught, discovered, and believed, so I will only focus on how their views played into the larger worldview of the Enlightenment. This does not mean that they necessarily held to the conclusions that I will point out – only that this is how their influence affected others who came after them. Also, though they contributed greatly to the Enlightenment, I do not have time to explain the philosophy of Benedict Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, George Berkeley, or Thomas Hobbes.

Isaac Newton – His work in optics, light, physics, and (especially) gravity was revolutionary in terms of discovering the natural mechanics of the world. Though Newton was a theist, his ideas would be used by later thinkers to say that we do not need God to understand the world because we can simply learn the mechanical laws of physics to know why things happen.



-Newton discovered the three laws of physics, calculus, and gravity while in his early 20s.

-Isaac Barrow, who held the highest chair of Mathematics at Cambridge, upon reading Newton's works immediately resigned and gave his teaching position to Newton.

-Napoleon once asked his court astronomer if there would ever be another Newton. The astronomer replied, "no sire, for there would have to be another universe to discover."

-The English poet, Alexander Pope famously said of Newton:

"Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night
God said, 'let Newton be,' and all was light."

Francis Bacon – He thought that the medieval university education was too scholastic and Aristotelian, and that it didn't actually help humans flourish. He sought to emphasize *empiricism and the scientific method* and is a major contributor to the new method of doing research. This contributed to the focus on scientific method to find truth apart from revealed religion.

Rene Descartes – The father of modern rationalism (the idea that we have innate ideas that we come to apart from experience). His philosophy attempted to begin with what cannot be doubted by human reason and use that as a building block to construct an entire worldview that could be intellectually certain. *This contributed to the idea that mankind should begin with human reason*

in finding truth and also that mankind had to be certain of what we know (thus deemphasizing faith).



John Locke – Emphasized that our mind is a blank slate (“*tabula rasa*”) and that all our knowledge is derived from experience (i.e. empiricism). This further contributed to looking for truth by sense perception. Locke’s political philosophy was a major catalyst to the American Revolution.

David Hume – Showed how it was ultimately passion, and not reason, that lead humans to make decisions. Hume’s philosophy contributed to skepticism because he showed that we could have no scientific knowledge at all! He was also a congenial atheist whose rejection of God and miracles is well known.

Immanuel Kant – Showed how we don’t just perceive bare facts as they are in themselves (*noumena*) but rather contribute, through our mind, the facets of time, space, and certain philosophical categories. We thus can only get to *our perception* of the things outside of us (*phenomena*) and not the things themselves. This contributed to the idea that we are not passive receivers but actively involved in constructing our view of the world around us. He also thought all proofs for the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and free will were seeking to go beyond what could be known. Faith was a separate realm from reason for Kant.

“I had to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*” -Kant



Jean-Jacques Rousseau – Was an anti-Enlightenment thinker. He believed that mankind, in a state of nature, would be kind and peaceful. The development of civil society with all its institutions is what corrupts us. Society causes us not to be true to ourselves because we have to fake our behavior to fit within what society accepts. This is actually what leads to ambition and harming one another. This contributed to a disillusionment with foundational institutions of society and was a distant precursor to postmodern thought. This also contributed to thinking that mankind is naturally good, and it is society around us which corrupts us. This is explicitly the view of the left when one says a criminal committed a crime because they had a bad upbringing, etc.



“One is born free and everywhere is in chains.” -Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Rousseau is a precursor to Karl Marx because he believed one’s “true self” was what the general will / community believed. So one’s personal liberties should be overruled if they are not in accordance with the popular opinion.

Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet)- A philosopher, writer, and critic of all forms of authority that he considered to stand in the way of reason. This contributed to the criticism of Christianity for not according itself with the dictates of Enlightenment ideals.

Deism and Unitarianism

Deism held that many Christian doctrines (including miracles) are false and that, though God caused the world to exist, he no longer interacts with it. The example often given is that God is like a giant clockmaker who winds up the universe and then just lets it run according to natural laws.

Deism held to:

- The existence of one God
- The duty of man to worship God
- The primacy of morality in religion
- The reality that mankind has done wrong
- The fact that all people will give an account for their actions

Unitarianism, founded by John Biddle (1615-1662), denied the Trinity and claimed that only the Father was God. Unitarianism emerged at Harvard in 1805 and corrupted Congregationalist churches in the U.S.

Natural religion was an attempt to create religion just from reason and natural, scientific exploration without all the doctrines and dictates of revealed religion.

In 1794 Thomas Paine critiqued organized religion in his work, *The Age of Reason*. Thomas Jefferson cut out all the miracles in the New Testament so he could simply see the ethical teachings of Jesus. It was called *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (1820).

The result of replacing God with Enlightenment ideals: The French Revolution

-The French Revolution was from 1787-1799.

-Causes include: a growing distain for the wealthy class (bourgeoisie) by the poorer classes, the lack of food for many peasants (a loaf of bread could cost up to a week's wages), new theories of rights for all people (also seen in the American Revolution), a hatred for the French monarchy (which the people no longer saw as ordained by God), and others.

-On July 14, 1789 peasants stormed the famous Bastille prison which was a symbol of royal tyranny. The peasants tore down the entire brick castle by hand. They found only 7 prisoners; the famous playboy, Marquis de Sade, had already been moved.

-By September 24, 1792 the new regime, the National Convention, abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic.

-The guillotine was the most popular way of executing people who disagreed with the new regime. It was called the following names: the National Razor, the Widow, the Patriotic Shortener, the Regretful Climb, and the Silence Mill.



-King Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette were both guillotined in 1793. The people knew what the king looked like (though he tried to escape) because his face was on the French coins. Marie-Antoinette never said “let them eat cake;” supposedly her last words were “*pardon, monsieur*” (“pardon me, sir”) after accidentally stepping on the executioner’s toe.

-The new regime promoted taxing the rich, free education for all, national assistance for the poor, etc.

-They opposed anyone who stood in the way of their policies. From September 1793 - July 1794 the infamous “Reign of Terror” led by Maximilien Robespierre was underway. 300,000 people were arrested, 17,000 people were executed (many by guillotine), and the national army swarmed to over 1 million soldiers. The high estimate of how many people were executed during the French Revolution is 40,000. Between 1,800 and 4,600 people were drowned. In France, people could still legally be executed by guillotine until 1981.

-Robespierre’s group during the Reign of Terror was called the “Committee on Public Safety.”

“Whoever refuses to obey the general will, will be forced to do so by the entire body; this means merely that he will be *forced to be free.*” Jean-Jacques Rousseau

-The entire project was a failure, and France was taken over by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799 (just 10 years after the revolution began). When he was crowned king he took the crown out of the hands of the bishop and crowned himself king!

-The French Revolution exemplified many of the anti-Christian facets of the Enlightenment.

-They made their calendars more logical. They had a 10 hour day with 100 minutes per hour and 100 seconds per minute. They had 10 days weeks as a repudiation of the 7-day week outlined in the Bible.

-They erected a statue to the “goddess of Reason” in the public square.

-They printed pornography to be used as political satire in pamphlets that they handed out to the people.

-Robespierre replaced Christianity with the “cult of the Supreme Being” and named himself its leader.

-Crosses were removed from cemeteries and, in some places, the title placed over the cemetery simply said “Death is an eternal sleep.”

-Many people celebrated the famed sexual libertine, Marquis de Sade. He wrote a pornographic novel called *The 120 Days of Sodom*.

“In order to know virtue, we must first acquaint ourselves with vice.” -Marquis de Sade

The Enlightenment’s influence on the church

-The church greatly lost its power and influence.

-A lot of unchristian and anti-Christian philosophy was developed at this time.

-However, some helpful Christian philosophy was also promoted during this era.

-Descartes came up with a new proof for the existence of God.

-George Berkeley’s philosophy was exceptionally Christian; Jonathan Edwards would go on to develop a view similar to Berkeley’s.

-Gottfried Leibniz’ philosophy was exceptionally Christian as well.

-Political liberties that were given to all people became an important value.

-Toleration for Christians with other views was finally allowed.

-From that point on science would become the highest field of study (instead of theology).