THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY INTRODUCED TWO GREAT MOVEMENTS TO WESTERN CIVILIZATION. THE FIRST ONE WAS THE GROWING POWER OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, REPRESENTED BY ABSOLUTISM, WHICH WE TALKED ABOUT BEFORE THE FIRST HOUR TEST AND WILL TALK ABOUT AGAIN. THE SECOND WE ARE GOING TO PRESENT TODAY: THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION, WHICH IS PRIMARILY A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PHENOMENON, BUT HAS SOME ROOTS IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

The basic characteristic of the first scientific revolution is what you would expect: a renewed interest in science. Science was studied a lot in the Ancient World—the time of Greece and Rome—but it was not even on the map in the Medieval World, which worried about the things that we have talked about like how one is saved. But science took on new life in the seventeenth century, and we will start with the question: Why? The answer is: No one knows for sure, but there are some reasons that are offered and usually accepted.

The first reason is one that cannot be explained at all, and that is that in the seventeenth century lived some of the greatest scientific minds of all time. These men, often working alone or with a few assistants, made some great discoveries and had them printed. And that led to additional great discoveries. We do not know why all of these great thinkers appeared in the seventeenth century, but they did.

The second reason is that, by the seventeenth century, scientific discovery was building upon scientific discovery. As we so well know today, great discoveries in science do not occur in vacuums. And enough research and publication were being done at this time that certain individuals could look at the information already known and make some astounding conclusions from them.

A third reason is the Protestant Reformation, not in the sense that the Reformation led to scientific discovery, but it led to warfare and death. Perhaps prominent thinkers looked upon religion in general as something that leads to destruction and death and so looked for ways of thinking that would not be controlled by religion. And they found science.

And the final reason, which is related to the third one and was put forward in the early 20th century, was that the scientific revolution was caused by the Protestant Reformation because Protestantism told people that all work was righteous, not just that of priests (community of believers). Therefore, great thinkers did not need to join the church and write stuff about salvation but could turn their minds to science. He argued that is why Britain and the Netherlands, both Protestant countries, led in the scientific revolution. That is all well and good, but not all of the great scientists were Protestant; many were Catholic.

Beginnings of Scientific Thought

The first is an Englishman named *Francis Bacon*, who lived between 1561 and 1626. Francis Bacon argued that, when it comes right down to it, the thinking men of his time knew very little about science. They relied for their science on the writings of the great classical scholars such as Aristotle, and all of the great thinkers since then—men like Thomas Aquinas—had argued about what further information we can deduce from what the ancient scientists had written.

Bacon said that was not the way to learn. What we needed to do was conduct our own experiments, make our own observations of things, reach our own conclusions, and not simply spend our time trying to take Aristotle and see what else we could learn from him. Bacon said that, if we want to learn about leaves, we should not look up what Aristotle said about leaves, but we should go out and gather leaves, study them, analyze them, run experiments on them, and then come up with our own ideas about leaves.

As you can see, this is the scientific method that we use today. We conduct experiments, see what happens, and then publish the findings so that other people can conduct the same or similar experiments to see if the conclusions we reached can be duplicated. This kind of thinking is called inductive reasoning, because it begins with a bunch of particulars (experiments) and leads to general conclusions.

But, if you think about it for a minute, there is one area of science where inductive reasoning does not work very well, and that is mathematics. In mathematics one does not use inductive reasoning. We do not have to prove that two and two equals four, that is a given. We do not have to prove that two parallel lines never meet; that is a given. Remember Geometry when you took certain mathematical laws that you did not question, and applied them to prove other mathematical problems. The kind of reasoning that requires you to take general laws and apply them to specific problems is called deductive reasoning. And the great mathematician of this time was a Frenchman (and a Catholic priest) named *Rene Descartes*, who lived from 1596 to 1650.

René Descartes, French philosopher and Mathematician.

Descartes believed that there were two different kinds of reality in the world. One of these was what he called "*Thinking Substance*." This reality exists inside the human mind; it includes the most real elements of the human experience like joy, grief, love, hate, color, sound—all the things that affect the senses. He pointed out that Thinking Substance is in fact what proves our own existence. How can we prove that we are real? We think. In fact perhaps his most famous saying was "*Cogito, ergo sum*," "I think, therefore I am."

The other kind of reality in the world was what he called "*Extended Substance*" and this was anything that could be measured. And he said that anything that can be measured can be turned into an algebraic formula. In fact, he was the developer of coordinate geometry, which all of you have had to study. He believed that anything measurable can be reduced to formulas and equations. He once said, "Give me motion and extension, and I will build you a world."

Astronomy

Probably the greatest discoveries of the scientific revolution were in the area of astronomy. And in order to appreciate those discoveries, we need to spend a little time on what scholars thought the universe was like prior to the great astronomers of the scientific revolution. but, in order for this to make an impact, maybe I better tell you what people thought about the universe before the First Scientific Revolution.

The common view of the universe in, say, 1500 was based on the observations of a Greek astronomer named Ptolemy who lived in the 2nd century A.D. Ptolemy postulated that the universe had as its center the earth. It was round, by the way; no scholar thought it was flat.

The earth in the middle was surrounded by a series of spheres, each one inside the other. In each sphere was the moon, sun, planets, and stars, such like jewels in this glass like substance.

The motion of the spheres was perfectly circular, and each sphere moved at a fixed speed. Beyond the outer sphere lay heaven, where God and the angels lived. Everything above the earth was made of a single, constant, incorruptible material called the fifth essence, or quintessence. On earth we have four substances, all of which change, and they are earth, water, air, and fire. Earth and water pulled things down; air and fire raised things up.

As you can see, from the bottom up—to God—things became better and better. Down at the bottom we have rocks, and next to God are the angels. This was the origin of the Great Chain of Being. The only thing that could pass from the earthly sphere of constant change to the heavenly sphere of eternity was human beings. And the idea was that human beings themselves were in a great chain of being, with the peasants on the bottom and the Pope at the top.

New Astronomers

The first person to suggest that this might not be quite the way it was a Polish scientist named Nicholas Copernicus, who lived from 1473 to 1543. Copernicus wondered why these perfect crystalline spheres with their perfect circular motion did not work very well. He decided that it would all work a lot better if the sun were in the center and the earth in the third position.

The second man to introduce changes was a German named John Kepler, 1571-1630. Kepler was a mathematical genius, and he showed that the planets did not move in a perfect circular motion around the sun (he accepted Copernicus's theory) but in ellipses. And he also discovered that the closer a planet was to the sun, the faster it moved. He even discovered a formula for that movement: the square of the time is proportional to the cube of the distance.

But the man who made the great discoveries was Galileo, who lived in Italy from 1564-1642. He made a variety of discoveries. He built a telescope and discovered all kinds of unknown things in the universe. He discovered that the moon had mountains like the earth, he discovered that the moon did not give off its own light, he discovered that some planets had visible size and some did not, and he discovered that the sun had spots on it.

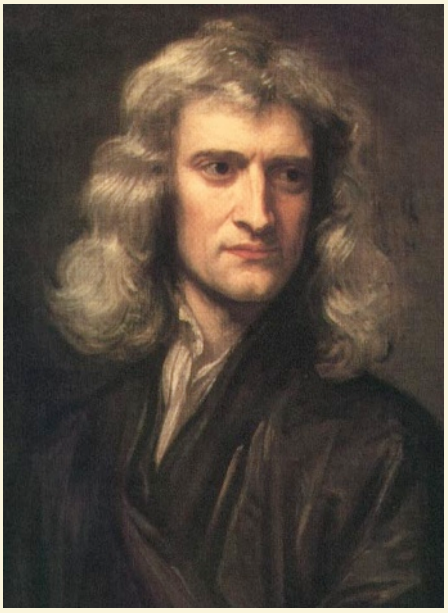
He discovered a lot of things that dealt with earth as well such as that weight of objects is irrelevant to the speed with which they fall, and the law of inertia—a body tends to continue at rest or in motion in a straight line unless acted upon by an outside force.

Claudius Ptolemaeus was a scholar in Egypt in the 2nd Century who created the earth-centric model for the universe that persisted down to the 1600s. The Catholic church did not officially abandon the Ptolemaic system until 1758. At right outside of the box is Galileo.

Galileo was a Catholic, and his discoveries got him into trouble with the Church because his discoveries all seemed to indicate that the universe was not perfect, which went against Catholic teaching. The Church tried him for heresy, and he recanted. The story is that he said that it was all true anyway, so it did not matter whether or not he in particular said something was true.

The Problem with the new Science

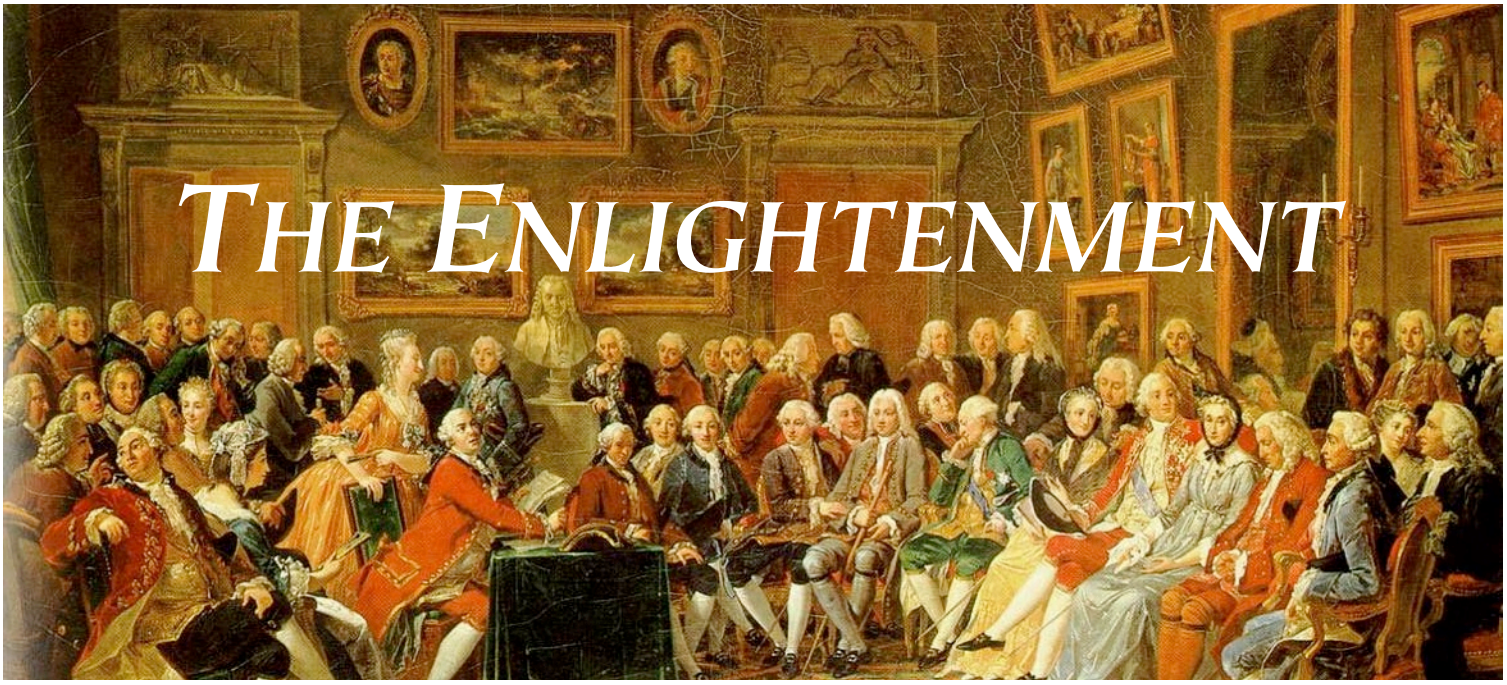
Isaac Newton (1643-1727)



But a persistent problem in all of these discoveries was that no one could figure out how it all actually worked. If the earth were just a planet like the others and not the center of the universe, how did we actually stand here and not fall off? If the planets were not set in perfect crystalline spheres, what held them up? And how did the planets revolve around the sun anyway, especially at different speeds and on different courses? Ptolemy may have been wrong, but what is there to replace his ideas? The guy who came up with the answer was an Englishman named Isaac Newton, the greatest of all of these scientists. Newton, who lived from 1642 to 1727, worked with the theories and systems of Bacon, Descartes, Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and many others and came up with the idea of how the whole system works. And he published his theory in a book with the not terribly catchy title of *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*.

In this book Newton argued that all matter moves as if every particle attracted every other particle with a force proportional to the product of the two masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. The law of gravity! Wonderful!

Now, all of these great discoveries have consequences. When these discoveries slowly but surely were appearing, thinking people began to worry that, not only was their carefully ordered universe dissolving, but there seemed to be no order in it at all. Could God have created a universe that was essentially chaos? Was God still part of the equation, so to speak? This was a very religious age, and no one, not even those who raised doubt, were willing to take a view of the universe in which God did not exist. A universe without God would be absolute chaos and worse. No one could believe that, but they also had no proof that it was not chaos. But Isaac Newton provided the proof that the universe was in fact guided by the laws of God and that these laws were not superstitious or magical but highly mathematical. For Newton, God had made the universe and built into it the laws that kept it going. God was at once an engineer and a mathematician. And God had provided human beings with the intelligence to discover the natural laws (built into nature) that God had left from his Creation. In other words, the Scientific Revolution, instead of being a great spiritual crisis, became a real confidence builder. God was not an arbitrary figure whose actions were incomprehensible and capricious; he was a scientist and mathematician who had created laws by which the universe functioned. So, people confidently set out to find other laws of God in nature and in the universe, and, of course, began to look for natural or God-given laws that cover human behavior as well. But that is a preview of coming attractions.



The Enlightenment

The 18th century Enlightenment was an intellectual movement that was spurred on by the accomplishments of the Scientific Revolution that preceded it. Its followers proudly announced that by applying the new principles of science to all other areas of study—to politics, religion, economics, and so forth—people could free themselves from traditional ways of thinking and living and improve their lives.

When I ended the lecture on the scientific revolution, one of the things that I stressed was that it would not be long before people would take the principles of the scientific revolution and apply them to relationships among humans. Well, that is what the Enlightenment is. The Scientific Revolution of the 17th century seemed to prove that God had not created a world that was arbitrary. Rather, the Scientific Revolution seemed to prove that God had created a world that ran according to strict mathematical laws and had given people the power to discover and to understand those laws.

Enlightenment Thought

Most Enlightenment thought stemmed from three basic premises: (1) the entire universe is fully intelligible and governed by natural rather than supernatural forces; (2) rigorous application of "scientific method" can answer fundamental questions in all areas of inquiry; and (3) the human race can be "educated" to achieve nearly infinite improvement. The first two of these premises were products of the scientific revolution and the third primarily an inheritance from the psychology of John Locke.

On the first point, for an explanation we must look to the discoveries of English astronomer Sir Isaac Newton. Newton discovered a single law that made all motion in the heavens and earth became intelligible and predictable. If the motion of the universe was governed by a law of nature, it seemed to follow that all nature was governed by understandable universal laws.

The Divine Clockmaker

Influenced by the thought of Isaac Newton, 18th century thinkers believed that God had created a world that ran according to strict mathematical laws and that He had given people the power to discover and to understand those laws. The painting by William Blake shows "God the Mathematician" at work.

Since the universe operated by itself, based on natural and unchangeable laws rather than constant direct divine intervention, religion became somewhat irrelevant to Enlightenment thinkers. In fact, they considered traditional religion to be an impediment to the understanding of the world. This is not to say that the Enlightenment abandoned belief in the existence of God. Very few Enlightenment thinkers were atheists, or even avowed agnostics. Most adhered to a religious view known as Deism. Deists assumed that God existed but, after He had created a perfect universe, He no longer took an active interest in it. Expressed in the language of the Deists themselves, God was the "divine clockmaker" who, at the beginning of time, constructed a perfect timepiece and then left it to run with predictable regularity. Most Deists continued to attend the churches of their ancestors (either Protestant or Catholic) from time to time, but they made little secret of their doubts about the worthwhileness of ritual and spoke out against all forms of religious intolerance.

The accomplishments of the Scientific Revolution inspired a deep sense of assurance that "scientific method" was the only valid means for pursuing research in all areas of human inquiry. By scientific method Enlightenment thinkers usually meant the dispassionate, empirical observation of particular phenomena in order to arrive at general laws.

The third premise, that is, the idea of human improvement or human progress, was the brainchild of the English political philosopher John Locke. Although Locke's political ideas were to have a great impact on the Western World later in the 18th century, it was his theory of knowledge that initially influenced Enlightenment thinkers. In his *Essay Concering Human Understanding*, written in 1690, Locke argued that every person was born with a *tabula rasa* — a blank mind. This idea doesn't seem all that revolutionary to us today, but it was profoundly new when he offered it. Philosophers from Plato in Ancient Athens to Rene Descartes had argued that knowledge already existed in our heads, and that experience liberated knowledge. Put simply, earlier thinkers had supposed that humans inherited knowledge and intelligence along with other personal traits. Locke argued that our knowledge is derived from our environment, not our heredity, from experience and reason, not from tradition and faith.

The Enlightenment concept of progress might best be stated as "each generation is a little better off than the one before it." Now, this does not always mean materially better off, and probably the people of the Enlightenment would agree that it does not necessarily mean spiritually better off, and it certainly doesn't mean materially better off. What they meant was that over time, as people use their reason more and more, greater discoveries are made, better principles are applied, and people become increasingly reasonable. By the same token there is less superstition, less intolerance and less fear. All of that is progress. Just to give you an example of this idea, a French mathematician named Antoine Condorcet published in 1795 a book entitled Progress of the Human Spirit, in which he wrote that the future held nothing less than "the indefinite perfectibility of the human race."

Natural Laws

Thinkers in the 18th century came to believe that if there were laws that govern human relationships that have just as much validity as those laws that govern the movements of the universe, then it should be possible for human beings to discover them. The thinkers of the Enlightenment firmly believed that there were such laws, and we are going to talk about a couple of general principles of the Enlightenment first, and then we are going to talk about some of the particular thinkers of the Enlightenment and what they came up with. Ok, first principle of the Enlightenment—that virtually all of the Enlightened thinkers believed was true—was that there are fundamental laws that distinguish right from wrong. These are called "natural laws" because they are laws that are God-given and embedded in nature. They apply to all human beings no matter what religion they are, what culture they are, when and where they existed. They are laws that have always existed because they are God's laws for human beings. And how can people find out what those laws are? The same way scientists find out the laws of the universe. They use their God-given reason.

What are some of these laws: One might be that cannibalism is bad. Now, one could argue that certain cultures do not think cannibalism is bad, so what would give the people of the Enlightenment the right to say that it is bad? If we argue that cannibalism is acceptable, even virtuous, in some cultures, we are employing a modern approach to ethics called "cultural relativism" or "moral relativism." These two terms aren't really the same thing, but are treated as though they were by some modern academics. Anyway, Enlightenment thinkers had no use for such notions. They would answer that reason makes cannibalism wrong. Another natural law is that it is wrong— no matter what the culture or society—to make children work in factories. We have that debate going on in our country. Some people argue that it is OK for children to work in factories in places like Thailand, as long as they are not in a Western country (there is that relativism again). The people of the Enlightenment would say "No, that is wrong no matter where it is." Or maybe a better way to frame their argument is, "If something is "naturally" wrong in one place where

humans are, it is wrong everywhere. There is not place where it is right!" Simply put, Enlightenment thinkers believed that there was right and there was wrong, and there was no maybe, no "cultural relativism," no middle ground, and humans could decide right from wrong through the use of reason and logical argument.

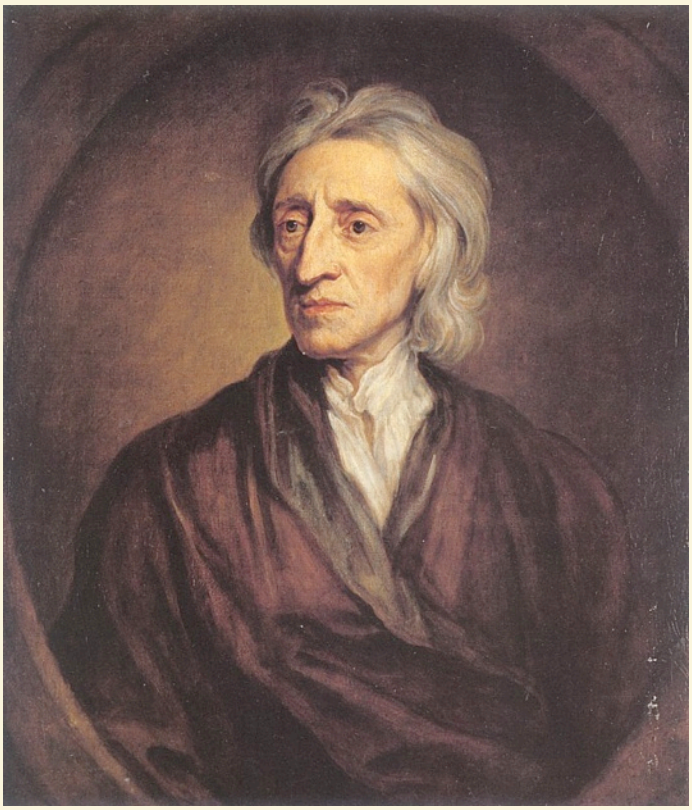
Enlightenment Political Thought

Now we are going to talk about some folks who are part of the enlightenment, and we are going to begin with a group of political philosophers. After all, when one talks about the relationships of people to one another, invariably that means politics. The "grandfather" of Enlightenment political thought is a fellow that we have looked at before. His name is John Locke, he is English, and he lived from 1632-1704, we might say at the very beginning of the Enlightenment. As we have seen in a previous lecture, Locke wrote a book called *Two Treatises on Government*. He wrote them in protest against what he considered the tyrannical rule of James II in England in the 1680s. In this work, Locke set out to discover why governments exist and what the purpose of government was.

John Locke approached the question: what is the nature of government. Now in the previous centuries, the basic idea was is that government is something that was created by God. Kings were appointed and anointed by God and so they ruled by what was called "Divine Right." God had essentially ordained that certain people would be kings and other people would serve them. But the problem was that the Scientific Revolution rather upset the great chain of being, so thinkers like John Locke wondered if there were not some other way to explain how and why governments exist.

Locke concluded that governments exist as a political contract between the rulers and ruled. Basically, what that means is that in a political contract people give up some of their liberty in exchange for security. Locke argued that in earliest human times, people lived without government in a "state of nature." They owned property, and were free, and could do what they liked (were at liberty) with their lives and property. But, the problem was that they could be bullied and robbed and enslaved or killed by stronger individuals. So, people came together and formed governments by agreement. They gave up some of their liberty and some of their property in return for protection and security.

Locke said that unrestricted liberty leads to chaos, so people must give up some of it simply to survive. The rulers provide justice, security, and other benefits to the ruled, and the ruled provide taxes, service, and loyalty to the ruler. But this agreement is a contract. And as part of that contract, the rulers have to recognize that human beings have certain



John Locke 1632-1704

Locke's ideas had an enormous influence on the development of political philosophy, and he is widely regarded as one of the most influential Enlightenment thinkers.

"natural"—get that word "natural" again—God-given rights. And for Locke these rights were life, liberty, and property. People must have freedom, Locke wrote, but freedom is not the right to do whatever you want. It is the right to do whatever you want providing you do not infringe in any way on the freedom of someone else. In other words, freedom means responsible and reasonable behavior.

Locke went on to write that, if the ruler violates these rights or in any way does not live up to his part of the contract, then the people have the right to overthrow that ruler and get one who will keep up his side of the contract. So, as you can see, this can be a way to justify political revolution, and, as you can see, our forefathers really knew their John Locke.

Another political philosopher of the enlightenment made a deep impression on American thinkers, and that was a Frenchmen by the name of Montesquieu who lived between 1689 and 1755. In 1748 Montesquieu published a book entitled *The Spirit of Laws*.

In that book he argued that the best government—the best natural government—was a government in which power was not concentrated in the hands of one person or a small group of people, but rather divided among a great number of bodies both great and small and with different functions.

What does that mean? He argued that a central government, like a king and his ministers, should have certain powers but not all powers. Provinces should have certain powers; towns and cities should have certain powers; parishes should have certain powers; and these powers should all be reserved for them and the others should not interfere with them. He also said that the different functions of government should be separated by different bodies to carry them out. And they are the ones familiar to us: executive, legislative and judicial. Montesquieu was the great advocate of separation of powers and checks and balances. That way there is no despotism. Now, notice that he was not really popular among the absolute monarchs, but he was enormously popular among Americans writing the constitution. In fact, he said in his book that the best government was the government of Britain, because it came closest to the kind of separation of powers that he had in mind.

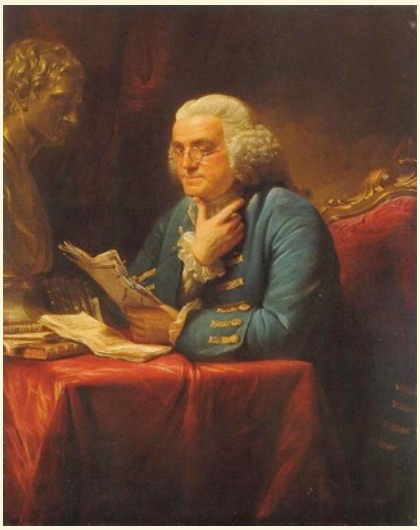
A third political philosopher worthy of mention is a man named Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was a Frenchman and lived between 1712 and 1778. Rousseau did not present his ideas as clearly as did Locke and Montesquieu, not because he wrote poorly or was fuzzy thinking but because his ideas were a lot more complicated. Rousseau also believed in the idea of a contract, but he said that the contract that establishes society is not a political contract—it is not a contract between the rulers and the ruled—but rather it is a Social Contract that is really a contract among all the people who make up a particular society. And he put his ideas in a book entitled *The Social Contract*, which he published in 1762 and which, if you are a Political Science major, you will probably read at one time or another.

This is a tough book to understand, but basically what Rousseau is trying to get at is something that Locke talked about. Locke said that human beings give up their liberty to a ruler in exchange for security and that is the foundation of a state. Rousseau said that is not really true; human beings give up their liberty to one another in order to create a general sense of direction for society as a whole. And he called his sense of direction the *General Will*. Society has a common interest, and each individual *must* buy into that common interest. How can that common interest be expressed? He is not really clear on that; he struggles with that one. Interestingly, Rousseau reflects much of the nature of absolutism in French social life. Rousseau, unlike Locke, believes that private property is socially destructive. In an absolutist monarchy, only the king really owns property, and the assumption that anyone else does is destructive to the social fabric. Rousseau's ideas about social contracts will influence the French Revolution in some pretty negative ways in terms of human life, liberty and property, as Locke might say.

The *Philosophes*

There are a whole lot more Enlightenment thinkers that we could talk about, but we are not going to. Instead we are going to finish the lecture by talking about a group of people who really made the Enlightenment go, and these people are called the *philosophes*. Not philosophers, but *philosophes*. The *philosophes* were the great writers of the Enlightenment. These were people, men and even women now, who wrote about these great ideas, but in a way that people could read and understand. They pursued a kind of writing that was clear, easy to understand, witty, and at times fun to read. They were also the first people in Western Civilization who made livings by writing. Just to give you an American example, probably our greatest *Philosophe* was Benjamin Franklin, who not only was a printer but who printed and sold his own stuff. And the kind of thing he wrote—*Poor Richard's Almanac* and his practical advice—are just the kind of things people wanted to read.

And what this shows you is that there is now a reading public that is growing large enough to support writers. There are enough people now who not only know how to read but have enough money to buy books. It is no longer necessary to have people read to them.



Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

And the eighteenth century is the great age of newspapers. This is the century when newspapers and magazines really flourish. Just to give you an example, in 1700 the only newspapers published in England were published in London; in 1701 there appeared the first newspaper outside London—the *Norwich Post*. By 1760 there were 35 newspapers published in cities outside London, and by 1790 there were fourteen morning newspapers published in London alone. In 1799 there appeared the first Sunday newspaper in London. Even the *New York Times* was first published in the late 18th century. And magazines took off as well. By 1800 in England there were magazines of every imaginable kind, like magazines exclusively for gardening, exclusively for brides, exclusively for hunting, exclusively for how to raise children, and they all carried advertisements.

François-Marie Arouet (1694 – 1778), better known by the pen name Voltaire, was a French Enlightenment writer, essayist, deist and philosopher.

Voltaire

The greatest of the *philosophes* was a man named Voltaire, again a Frenchman who lived from 1694 to 1778. Voltaire didn't just make his living off writing, he grew rich at it. Voltaire was above all a great writer. His prose is logical, simple, incisive, and very funny. It is easy to read. If you are in your third semester of college French you can read Voltaire. He may have been very funny, but Voltaire wrote about serious topics and had serious views of them. His great cause was freedom of thought. He favored anything that encouraged people to think without prejudice and opposed anything that he thought tried to limit people from thinking freely. Now you may think to yourself, no one could be opposed to that, but Voltaire firmly believed that the one institution in Europe that did not allow people to think freely was the Roman Catholic Church. He was French, don't forget, and that is the religion of France. He did not have much use for any of the other organized religions either, but the Roman Catholic Church was the one he knew best. As far as he was concerned, the Roman Catholic Church was full of bigotry, superstition, and intolerance.

Throughout his adult life, he was relentless in his attacks on the Church. He declared that religion was not necessary to know the difference between right and wrong—reason can do that; in fact, he argued that religion often blurs the difference between right and wrong because people do as much wrong in the name of religion as they do right. He even wrote a history of the world in which he presented all religions as doing more harm than good. I might add that Voltaire lived in a lovely home right near the Swiss border so that he could get over it whenever he wrote something that the French authorities found particularly distasteful.

Conclusion

So, how should we sum up the Enlightenment? We should begin by saying that the thinkers of the Enlightenment, among them, the *philosophes*, charted a major new path in modern European and Western thought. Admiring Newton and the achievements of the Scientific Revolution, they tried to apply reason and the principles of science to bring about social reform. They were not philosophers in the classical sense because they dealt less with ideas in the abstract, and more on practical concerns. In their writings they championed reasonable moderation in social life, and they ridiculed the sacred institutions of the past—organized religion, the divine right of kings, feudal social relationships, traditional education, and slavery—in order to bring greater freedom and happiness to the human condition. More than any other previous group of Western thinkers, they strongly opposed the authority of the established churches and especially of Roman Catholicism. Most of them championed some form of religious toleration. They also sought to achieve a science of society that could discover how to maximize human productivity and material happiness.

The political influence of these writers went in several directions. The founding fathers of the American republic looked to them for political guidance, as did moderate liberal reformers throughout Europe, especially within royal bureaucracies. The autocratic rulers of eastern Europe consulted the *philosophes* in the hope that Enlightenment ideas might allow them to rule more efficiently. Their ideas influenced the French Revolution, the American Revolution, and other movements into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This odd assortment of followers illustrates the diverse character of the *philosophes* themselves. It also shows that Enlightenment thought cannot be reduced to a single formula. Rather it should be seen as an outlook that championed change and reform, giving a central place to humans and their welfare on Earth rather than to God and the hereafter.

ENLIGHTENED ABSOLUTISM

Introduction

Among the themes that we have studied in this course are the scientific revolution and its successor, the Enlightenment, and absolutism and the growth of the modern state. Today we bring these two ideas together in something called enlightened absolutism, which is a kind of government that appeared in the last half of the 18th century. What enlightened absolutism is at its foundation is absolute kings—and queens—who rule according to enlightened ideas. Now, as always, let's put down a few general principles about these kings and queens.

First of all, these kings and queens no longer talk about things like glory and majesty, as did kings like Louis XIV. They do not claim that they rule because God has bestowed upon them the right to rule. They argue instead that they rule because it is good for society that they rule. One of these monarchs we are going to talk about, Frederick the Great, declared that he was the first servant of the state. Another, Joseph II, announced that his goal was to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number. So, they are different from earlier monarchs in terms of the spirit in which they rule.

Another quality of the enlightened absolutists is that they tend to stress the secular nature of their rule. Now, this by no means is to suggest that they did not believe in God or did not support the primary church of their state. It means, in most cases, that they favored religious toleration. They are not concerned if their citizens are all Catholic or all Lutheran or all Calvinist. Frederick the Great said on one occasion that he would welcome Muslims because he had heard that they were be good taxpayers. And the "enlightened" Catholic monarchs in Austria and France not only expelled the Jesuits from their lands but persuaded the Pope to abolish the Jesuit order in 1773. Now, you might say, "Wait a minute; I went to a Jesuit school," and that's because the Pope restored the Jesuits after 1815.

Finally, the absolute monarchs wanted to introduce policies that were reasonable. They wanted to get rid of traditions and customs and limitations on things like economic development that were old but no longer made any sense. They wanted to get rid of laws and customs left over from the Middle Ages that limited the progress the state could make. Let's take a look at some examples of enlightened absolutism, and we are going to begin with Austria, the Habsburg monarchy.

Habsburg Royal Family

Court of Frederick the Great of Prussia

Catherine the Great of Russia

Austria: Maria Theresia and Joseph II

IN 1740 EMPEROR CHARLES VI DIED, AND HE LEFT HIS THRONE NOT TO HIS ELDEST SON, WHICH WAS CUSTOMARY, BECAUSE HE DID NOT HAVE ANY SONS. In fact, no one in the Habsburg family had any sons; Charles was the last male Habsburg. So, the throne went to his daughter, Maria Theresia. It was actually illegal in the Habsburg Monarchy for a woman to rule, so, while he was alive, Charles had busied himself trying to get the various estates of the Monarchy and the other European powers to recognize his daughter's right to rule the Monarchy. They all agreed, of course, but as soon as Charles died, things fell apart. Prussia invaded a part of the Monarchy called Silesia, France declared war to get other some of the Habsburg lands, and a number of other states joined in to get a share of the spoils. It looked, in other words, as if the Habsburg Monarchy would be divided up among the various European states.

Some European rulers may have thought that they were in for some easy conquests, but they quickly found out instead that they were in for a hell of a fight. Maria Theresia was one of the most remarkable rulers of the 18th century. She rallied her people to fight against these many enemies, and she defeated all of them except the Prussians, who kept the province of Silesia, which they had conquered right when she became ruler.

Although she ended the war in 1748, Maria Theresia was determined to get Silesia back from the Prussians. But she knew that, in order to do that, she had to introduce a number of reforms to create an army and the necessary support system to do it. So from

1748 to 1756 she worked hard to transform the Habsburg Monarchy into an efficient, well-governed state. She established a system by which she could have a reliable budget every year and could collect taxes efficiently and punctually. And she built a considerable army.

In 1756 she set out to get Silesia back. She and her advisers put together a great alliance of Austria, France, and Russia to crush Prussia. This was called the Seven Years' War, which lasted from 1756 to 1763. In this war she fought against her worthy foe, Frederick the Great of Prussia, about whom more later. Frederick won the honor of being called the Great because of his terrific military skill in beating off the armies of these three states. Finally, all sides decided that they had had enough, and they signed a peace in 1763.

After 1763 Maria Theresia gave up on the idea of re-conquering Silesia, but she did not give up on the idea of transforming Austria into an enlightened state. From 1763 to her death in 1780 she worked on those reforms considered really enlightened: she modernized the criminal and civil law codes based on reason; she introduced one of the first systems of public education in Europe; she tried hard to alleviate the burdens of the peasantry; and she engaged in various economic reforms to bring stability and prosperity to her lands. The one thing that she could not do, however, was grant religious toleration. She was too good a Catholic for that. She preferred an enlightened Catholic Church, and did everything she could to transform the Austrian church into that kind of a church, but she remained to the end a devout and loyal Catholic and wanted her subjects to be that way.

HER SON JOSEPH II FOLLOWED HER AS RULER IN 1780 (he had been co-ruler since the death of his father in 1765). He was not as religious as his mother and far more determined to introduce sweeping reforms. In fact, of all the people we are going to talk about today, he is often cited as the most enlightened absolute monarch. Joseph set out issuing a bunch of decrees intent on changing the Habsburg Monarchy into the most enlightened state possible. Unlike his mother, he believed firmly in religious toleration, and one of his first acts was to grant religious freedom not only to most Protestants (not all) but to Jews, something unheard of before. In fact, he gave Jews full citizenship in the Monarchy, which was the first state to do that.

He also proclaimed freedom of the press. There was an explosion of newspapers and magazines in Austria in the wake of that ruling, which was truly unusual for any country outside Britain. He also proclaimed equal punishment for equal crimes, ridding Austria of the law that allowed different punishments for noblemen than for other people. He also abolished serfdom, which meant that semi-free and unfree peasants were now free from the most severe obligations to their lords. The peasants had to pay rent to work the land, but they no longer had to work on the lords' land or do all of the other kinds of labor that was required of them such as working on local roads for free.

These were just his high-profile reforms; he introduced hundreds of others as well in his effort to create the most reasonable, most enlightened state in Europe. But toward the end of his reign he ran into severe opposition. Many people were not crazy about these changes. Many members of the nobility did not want to lose control over their peasants and lose the perks that had come with feudalism; many Catholics were not crazy about religious toleration; and the free press, as you can easily imagine, turned from praising Joseph for his wise policies to criticizing him for not doing more or different things, or even doing too much! When he died in 1790, Joseph thought that he had been pretty much a failure. But he did more to create a modern state than any of his contemporaries did.

Joseph II Habsburg and his lovely sisters.

Frederick II (the Great) of Prussia

The next person was the great foe of Maria Theresia and Joseph II, Frederick II of Prussia, known in history as Frederick the Great. Frederick II ruled Prussia from 1740 to his death in 1786. As I mentioned before, he won the nickname "the Great" mainly because of his military ability. In fact, he was the greatest military commander of the eighteenth century.

Frederick is considered one of the enlightened absolutists, and there is no doubt that he talked a good enlightened line. He corresponded with some of the famous enlightened thinkers of his day, and he even had Voltaire visit him for quite an extended time. He was certainly prone to utter enlightened phrases such as "My chief occupation is fight ignorance and prejudice in my country. I will enlighten my people, cultivate their manners and morals, and make them as happy as human beings can be, or as happy as the means at my disposal permit."

And he did do a few enlightened things. He introduced religious toleration just as soon as he became king; he was the one who declared he would welcome Muslims to Prussia as long as they paid taxes. He introduced a lot of economic improvements such as swamp drainage, canal and road building, and improved import and export taxes. And he codified the laws to make them more equal and more uniform. He also implemented a public educational system that even the Austrians copied later. He did not go as far as Joseph, however. He did not introduce freedom of the press, and he certainly did not free the peasants. In fact, he preferred that Prussian society stay pretty much the way it was, which meant a society whose main purpose was to fight wars. For Frederick, the nobility's job was to provide officers for the army; the peasants' job was to provide soldiers for the army and raise food for the army; and the job of the towns was to provide money for the army. That is the way he liked it, and he did not want to change it much.

Catherine II (the Great) of Russia

The last of the enlightened absolutists is Catherine II of Russia, also called Catherine the Great. She ruled Russia from 1762 to 1796. She came to power by killing her husband, who was Tsar of Russia for a few months in 1762. He was not particularly popular with anyone, so a number of noblemen joined with Catherine in getting rid of him.

Like Frederick the Great, Catherine had a great press with enlightened thinkers. Like Frederick, she corresponded with a number of the great thinkers of the day, and she did quite a bit of writing herself, even an analysis of Blackstone's *Commentary on the Laws of England*. She also sent money to a number of enlightened writers, in some cases keeping them afloat financially.

Frederick the Great of Prussia is considered an enlightened monarch, but his "enlightenedness" was always tied to his military interests.

When she became Empress in 1762 she introduced a number of enlightened reforms. The first thing she did was gather a lot of information about the Russia at the time. She declared that she could not rule properly unless she knew what existed in this vast land of hers, and it was the first effort to create a statistical base upon which reforms could be made. After gathering that information, she introduced some changes. She codified laws, put restrictions on the use of torture, and provided some religious toleration but nothing like Joseph or Frederick. She also reformed the government, making the administration more efficient and clearing up abuses in local affairs.

But in 1773-74 an event occurred in Russia that caused Catherine to rethink the implementation of the enlightenment in Russia. In 1773 in eastern Russia a man named Pugachev led a revolution of Russian peasants against their lords. Pugachev's followers participated in wholesale slaughter not only of noblemen but of government officials and Orthodox priests. The rebellion ended in 1774 when a famine hit the part of Russia where the rebels were and when Catherine dispatched her best troops to put it down. Pugachev himself was captured, brought to St. Petersburg in an iron cage, and executed.

The Pugachev revolt, as it is called, ended Catherine's desire to introduce enlightened reform. In fact, after 1774 one could argue that she took Russia backward. She issued laws that gave the nobles full authority over their peasants, even the right to buy and sell them. In other words, Catherine turned the peasants of Russia into slaves, and from now on ads appeared in the Moscow and St. Petersburg newspapers advertising people for sale.

You might wonder why, if she even lowered the social status of such a large mass of the Russian population, she is called "the Great." The reason is that also during the course of her reign her armies not only fought wars and won them

but also added significantly to the land area of the Russian Empire. By the time of her death in 1796, Russia was not only a great power in Europe but one that people regarded as having enormous potential. And it was Catherine who gave Russia that reputation.

AS YOU CAN SEE, THIS MAY BE THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENED ABSOLUTISM, BUT THERE WERE CONSIDERABLE DIFFERENCES AMONG THESE MONARCHS. ONLY JOSEPH COULD BE CONSIDERED THE TRUE ABSOLUTE MONARCH BUT HE DID NOT LIKE THE PRINCIPAL WRITERS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT WHOM HE CALLED SCRIBBLERS. FREDERICK AND CATHERINE TALKED A GOOD GAME BUT DID NOT INTRODUCE THE REFORMS IN THEIR COUNTRIES THAT JOSEPH DID IN HIS. MARIA THERESIA INTRODUCED MANY REFORMS BUT DID NOT LIKE THE FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT, ESPECIALLY RELIGIOUS TOLERATION AND FREEDOM GENERALLY. THIS PERIOD—1750-1789—IS THE GREAT AGE OF EUROPEAN MONARCHY. This is the time when the most progressive, most modern, most forward-looking government in Western Civilization is monarchy. These kings, emperors, and empresses wanted to use all of the latest modern theories to make their states strong and prosperous, and they turned their resources to that end.

Catherine the Great of Russia was a VERY enlightened monarch until a peasant revolt gave her reason to become considerably less reasonable!

IN 1789 COMES THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, AND AFTER THAT MONARCHIES BECOME CONSERVATIVE. Monarchs after 1789 are fearful of change, try to stop it from happening, and are afraid of their people rather than eager to bring them to new levels of learning and prosperity. In the end they will be swept aside because they have so much trouble adjusting to change. At the end of the First World War, there are no kings or emperors or empresses of France, Russia, Prussia, or Austria. In fact, the only major monarchy left in Europe after the First World War is the British monarchy, which never was a part of the enlightened absolutism of the 18th century.

American & French Revolutions

Today we are going to talk about a topic that all of you have studied at one time or another—the American Revolution—and a topic that in some ways had a strong link to the American Revolution—the French revolution.

What I am going to do with the American Revolution is not go over its events but try to put it in a European context. In other words, talk about the role the American Revolution played in the general development of western civilization.

In order to understand the American Revolution in its western context, it is necessary not to look at what was going on in the thirteen colonies but what was going on in Britain. Now, it would appear that Britain escaped much of the political history of the European continent in the 18th century. It did not go through enlightened absolutism. There was no great enlightened king who introduced all kinds of fancy changes in Britain. In fact, in Britain one could make the case that the king was not even the most important political institution; the most important political institution in the eighteenth century was Parliament.

But if Parliament was the real power in Britain, it still faced many of the same difficulties as the enlightened absolutists did on the European continent. Britain, after all, fought wars. It did not raise armies quite as large as France, Austria, or Prussia, but it had the biggest navy in Europe and it subsidized a number of German princes so it could use their armies. So, Parliament was always looking for ways to raise money to pay for this navy and these soldiers.

Well, like the enlightened absolutist monarchs, Parliament thought that one way to get more resources to fight its wars and deal with its other government problems was to raise and collect taxes more efficiently. In other words, Britain may not have had an enlightened absolutist monarch, but Parliament was doing some of the things enlightened absolutists did.

George III (1760-1801)

Although George III looks pretty kingly above, he still lacked the real power that absolute European monarchs had. British government was dominated by Parliament in the 18th century and British kings held lass and less real power.

Taxing the Colonies

One of the places parliament believed needed reforming in order to pay more taxes was the thirteen colonies. As I mentioned last time, the Seven Years' War in Europe from 1756 to 1763 was fought in North America as the French and Indian War, with the British on one side and the French on the other. The British won, but they found the participation of the American colonists to be woefully inadequate. They assigned each colony a certain quota of soldiers to help defend British America, but only three sent the required number; some sent none at all, saying it was not their fight.

After the war ended, Parliament basically said, "Look, you are going to have to pay more and participate more in your own defense. You cannot expect us to bear the whole burden of protecting you." And that meant taxes. There had been some taxes imposed by the British before this time, but the Americans had refused to pay them.

Beginning in 1764 Parliament passed a number of taxes that the American colonists were to pay, and the Americans resisted every one of them. This was when the Americans declared that the British government had no right to tax Americans because Americans had no representation in Parliament.

One thing led to another as you so well know, and in 1774 a continental congress met in Philadelphia and passed a call for the boycott of British goods. That followed in April 1775 with the clash between American militia and British troops outside Boston, and that followed by the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. The Revolutionary War was underway, which the Americans won in 1781 and concluded with the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

Political Contracts in America

The most amazing thing to the Europeans was that the Americans seemed to be taking the Political Contract ideas of John Locke and others and putting them into practice.

The Declaration of Independence was a perfect example of how the Political Contract was supposed to work. The Declaration of Independence said that the responsibility of government is to guarantee certain rights and protections to the people that it governs. And, if the government fails in that responsibility, the people have the right to turn that government out and get another one. The Declaration of Independence then declared that the British government (it blamed the king, not the Parliament) was a government that had failed to protect these rights.

The Declaration of Independence was astonishing in itself (and it was printed all over Europe), but the Europeans were even more amazed at the appearance of constitutions. Now, this is not the US constitution; that comes much later. These are the state constitutions. As you may know, each of the 13 colonies had a charter from the king that spelled out how the colony was to be run. The Declaration of Independence declared those charters null and void, which meant that the 13 colonies had no document that spelled out how it would work—no constitution in other words. So, the legislatures of each of the colonies wrote new ones. Not only had the Americans done away with a political contract, they were now composing new political contracts. And this had just plain never happened before.

And I probably do not have to tell you that many Europeans thought, "I wonder if we could do that over here—dump our ruler and put together a new kind of state based on the consent of the governed." And that is the main way the American Revolution influenced the French Revolution; it set the example.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Author of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson incorporated Locke's political contract into the life of the American Republic.

France in the 1780s

Now we turn to the French Revolution, and we are going to start with some general conditions before we get into the events. The revolution began in 1789, so these are some comments related to what France was like in 1789.

First and quite important, one could argue that France was the most advanced country in Europe. It had a population of 24 million, which made it the largest country in Europe in terms of population; its exports to other European countries were more than any other country, including Britain; its language was the language of education and refinement; and it was the center of the Enlightenment. There seemed to be more intellectuals and writers in France than anywhere else. It was a cultural treasure house as well.

Its society, however, was still legally feudal. There were still many noblemen who had various privileges and rights left over from long ago. There was still the clergy, which considered itself a separate class. And there was still what we can now call the Third Estate, the group of everyone else who was not a clergyman or a nobleman. But the Third Estate was not the same as it was in the 17th century; now it had in it wealthy manufacturers, rich merchants, skilled professionals, and smart lawyers. Among these people there was a growing belief that this legal partition of the country was just not reasonable.

And there was growing unhappiness with the government. The government was still absolutist, based on the model set up by Louis XIV. But it seemed to be growing increasingly inefficient; it seemed to have fallen a long way in its energy level and competence from the days of Louis XIV. And there was growing feeling among all of the classes that absolutism in France had really outlived its usefulness, and it needed to be replaced by a government that had a greater participation from the people. There was a general feeling that the British model was the best and that France needed an elected Parliament of some kind.

What started the ball rolling toward revolution in France was the American Revolution, but not in a way you might expect. The French did not look upon the Americans as a great model to follow, at least not yet. Rather, the American Revolution contributed to the French Revolution directly because the French government viewed the American Revolution as a way to get back at its old enemy, Britain. Britain had defeated France in the Seven Years' War and had taken away all of Canada from the French. This loss still rankled the French government, and, when the American colonists rebelled, it looked upon the revolution as an opportunity to get back at Britain. After the Battle of Saratoga in 1778, the French signed an alliance with the Americans and sent a lot of aid. At the decisive Battle of Yorktown in 1781, French ships had hemmed in the British army from the sea while American and French soldiers surrounded it on land.

Louis XVI of France (1774-1791)

King of France during the American Revolution, Louis XVI gave aid to the American colonists' in their struggle against France's traditional enemy, Great Britain.

France's Economic Woes

But all of this cost money. And after it was over, the French government came to the horrible realization that it had spent so much cash on the American Revolution it was broke. Its income no longer could cover its expenditures. As I mentioned, the country was not poor by any means, but the problem was that the tax system was quite unequal. Some people were squeezed far more than they could pay and others were paying no taxes at all.

Now, you might say that what the king, now Louis XVI, should have done is simply collected the taxes he needed. After all, the government of France was still formally an absolute monarchy. Louis XIV had done it, as had a number of the European kings who copied him. But society in France was a lot more complicated and a lot more sophisticated in the 1780s than it had been in the 1680s, and in the 1780s virtually every part of society felt that government had to open up. Watching the American Revolution, reading Enlightenment stuff on political process, seeing Britain grow wealthy convinced Frenchmen of all kinds that there should be more popular participation in government.

In 1787 the king and his government decided that the only way to solve the financial crisis was to bring representatives to Versailles and talk to them about what should be done. So, in that year Louis XVI called a meeting of prominent people from around France in a body that became known as the Assembly of Notables. But this Assembly could not come up with a good recommendation. Louis XVI then went to the *Parlement* of Paris to see if he could raise taxes, and the *Parlement* said that he could not.

After the encounter with the Parisian *Parlement*, Louis XVI and his ministers threw up their hands and decided to call a meeting of the *Estates General*, the French version of British Parliament. The only problem was that it last met in 1614, 175 years ago. It was as if the United States got itself into a serious constitutional crisis today and decided to solve it by calling into existence an institution that last met in 1830. No one could remember how it was really chosen, how it had conducted its business, or how it had reached decisions.

The *Estates General* Meet

The Estates General met in may 1789 and immediately got into a wrangle over voting. Since society was still legally divided into estates, the Estates General met in three different houses or rooms. The First Estate, the clergy, all met together, as did the nobles and the leftovers.

But the two houses did not contain the same number of people. The house of the clergy consisted of 300 delegates as did the house of the nobility. But the Third Estate consisted of 600 delegates. So, right from the beginning, the Third Estate insisted that votes on specific issues be counted by individual members. One delegate one vote no matter what house he sat in. But the clergy and the nobility said that votes be taken on specific issues should be counted by house. So, if the clergy voted in favor of a bill 200-100, that would be one vote for; then if the nobility voted in favor of the same bill 200-100, that would be one vote for; if the Third Estate voted 100-500 against, that would be one vote against. The measure would then pass by a vote of 2-1, even though 700 voted against it and 500 voted for it. The Third Estate said that was not fair.

The king decided in favor of the three houses voting separately, but, to everyone's surprise, instead of accepting the ruling of the king, the Third Estate on June 17 simply announced that it and it alone was the representative government of France. It proclaimed its name to be the National Assembly and announced its intention to work with the king and invited the nobles and clergy sitting in the other houses to join them.

The National Assembly & the *Bastille*

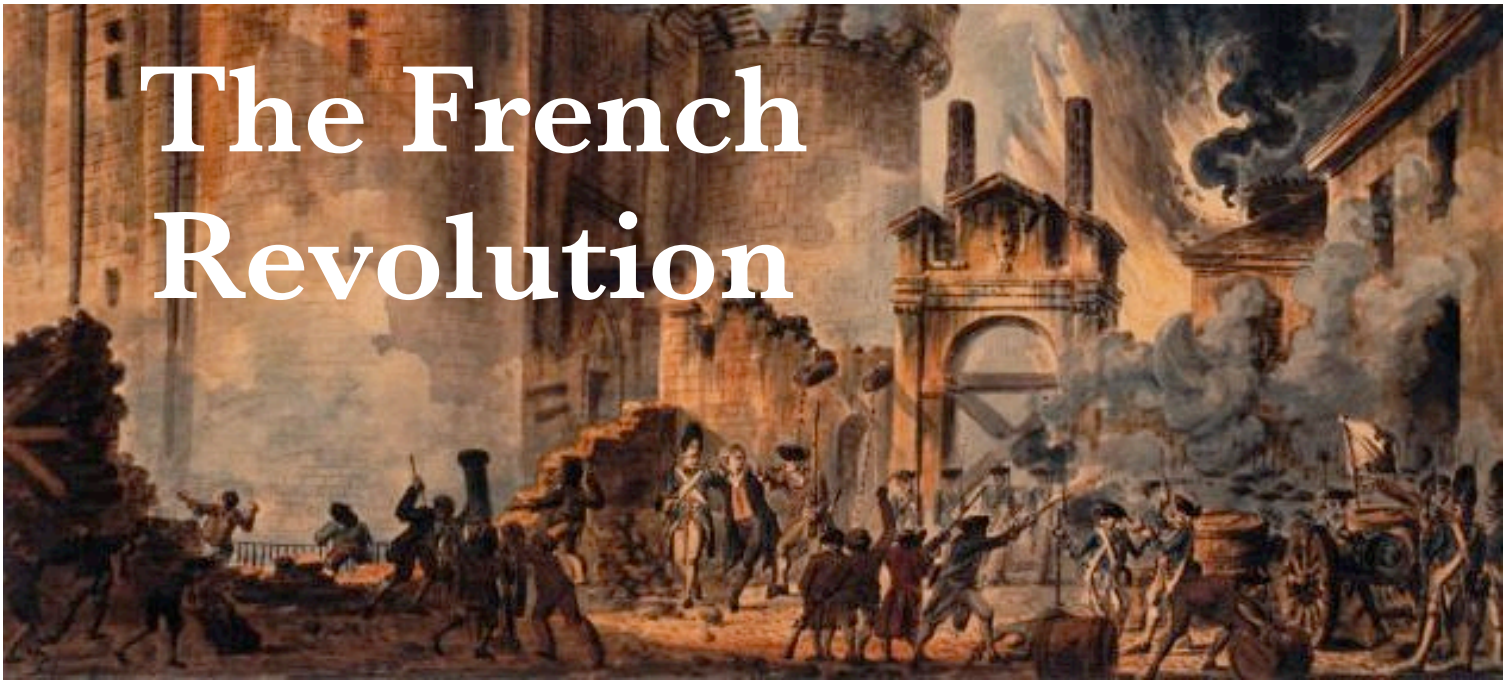
This was a real sensation; no one knew what to do now. The king talked and the members of the Third Estate talked and the members of the other two houses talked, and the first two estates even joined the Third; but it still seemed like the National Assembly was not getting anywhere.

In the meantime, though, there was great concern in Paris and throughout the country that the government had become paralyzed. And there were some issues that needed to be addressed besides the bankruptcy of the government, and one was the price of bread. Throughout the spring and early summer of 1789 the price of bread had been rising, and the common people were becoming increasingly restive. And some of these people believed that the success of the National Assembly was important to deal with the price of bread.

Things reached a crisis in early July 1789, when some people believed that it was necessary to arm themselves. They feared that the king might call in soldiers to arrest the National Assembly, and they did not want that to happen. One place to get weapons was an old armory/castle in Paris called the Bastille. Well, you probably know that on July 14, 1789 a crowd went to the Bastille to get the weapons, the soldiers guarding the Bastille fired on the crowd, and the crowd stormed the Bastille, killing the soldiers. They put the commander's head on a pike, carried it to the town hall, and, while at the town hall, killed the mayor and putting his head on a pike as well.

The king was absolutely shocked by this violence, and he ordered the First and Second estates to join the Third, thus recognizing the National Assembly as the real political power in France. He turned over power to this new body, and the revolution is off to the races.

The French Revolution



Last time we ended with the fall of the Bastille on July 14, 1789. The news of the fall of the Bastille spread throughout France, and the people in the country -- especially the peasants -- became fearful that soon the city folks who were angry over the price of bread would bring their violence to the country.

So, the peasants began to arm themselves, not with guns but with pitchforks and scythes. The angry people from the city never came, however, so the peasants thought to themselves, "we are armed and ready; let's use our weapons for something constructive. So, they attacked the manor houses. But this is not like the Peasants' Revolt in Germany during the Reformation; they did not go on a rampage of killing and burning. But they did break into manor houses and burned the records of what peasants owed what money and work dues. Called the Great Fear (see print below). In other words, they expressed the wish to end the remnants of the feudal system in the countryside.

Faced with violence in the cities and violence in the countryside, the king simply gave in. He told the National Assembly to do whatever it wanted. But what to do was the question.

The first step came on August 4. In the evening a few enlightened members of the nobility got up and simply renounced all of their privileges from their titles, their right to pay fewer taxes, and their control over their peasants. A few more did the same thing. Then motions were made to abolish all feudal dues, then came motions to abolish all tax privileges, then motions to abolish all titles, then motions to abolish special privileges of towns, of provinces, and of regions. Before it was over, the whole complex social system that had built up over centuries was simply abolished. In fact, one bill passed into law that night summed it up with the simple words, "feudalism is abolished."

On the night of August 4, 1789, representatives of the nobility and clergy renounced their ancient privileges. This set the stage for the Assembly to decree "the abolition of feudalism" as well as the Church tithe, regional privileges, and social privilege.

That is all well and good, but now the question is: if one complete abolishes the old social system, what becomes the new system? The National Assembly went to work on that immediately, and what it came up with on August 26, 1789 it came up with a new fundamental law for French society called the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The Declaration of the Rights of Man began its first article with the words, "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights." The second declared the aim of every political institution to be to preserve the natural rights of man which are "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression." The third one said that the "source of all sovereignty is in the nation." The fourth declared that "Liberty consists in the power to do anything that does not injure others." The sixth declared "Law is the expression of the General Will." The tenth read, "No one should be disturbed for his opinions, even religious." See all of that enlightenment language? These principles were to be the foundation of society.

The Restructuring of France

With the declaration of the rights of man as the fundamental law, the national assembly turned to creating a government, and that meant a constitution. It worked hard through the remainder of 1789 and into 1791. The new constitution provided for a single legislature, kept the king with limited powers, completely transformed the government, and even placed the French church under state control.

At each step of the way, the king approved all of the changes, and it looked both to the French people and to the other European countries that France seemed to be heading for a complete transformation with little real upheaval.

Flight to Varennes

But in June, 1791 that impression was shattered, for in that month the king, his queen, and their family tried to escape from France. They fled in the night for the Belgian border, since Belgium was part of the Habsburg Monarchy, and the Queen's brother was the emperor. They almost made it but were stopped at a border town called Varennes. Hence this event is called the Flight to Varennes. They were arrested and returned to Paris and imprisoned.

The Flight to Varennes had a profound impact on lots of people. It showed to many French folks that the king was not in favor of what was going on in France and never had been. He had gone along with events while waiting for the opportunity to run away.

To the other states of Europe, the Flight to Varennes indicated that the French Revolution was spiraling out of control. The kings especially did not like what was happening in France because it might set an example for their own people, and it was putting a fellow king in danger. That was not supposed to happen.

After Varennes

Now things do spiral out of control. In August, 1791 the emperor of Austria and king of Prussia signed and sent to France something called the Declaration of Pillnitz. This document basically said to the French government -- don't do anything stupid! What would be particularly stupid? Killing the king. Don't kill the king. It did not make any threats and did not say what the Austrians and Prussians would do in the event that harm came to the king; it was just a warning to be careful.

But that is not how the French interpreted it. Many in the National Assembly said that the Declaration of Pillnitz was a threat of war. In October, 1791 the National Assembly, just elected under the new election laws, met for the first time, and it was considerably more radical than the one that had drawn up the constitution.

Many of these people believed that France should declare war on Austria and Prussia and take the ideas of revolution to those countries. They would show the Austrian and Prussian people how to get rid of kings and establish the rights of man. Well, one thing led to another, and in April, 1792 the National Assembly declared war on Austria and Prussia, not the other way around.

Massacre of the Champs de Mars

he radicals launched a petition campaign against the king, which ended in a bloody riot on July 17, 1791. Wishing to avoid chaos and preserve their government, the National Assembly stood fast against the radicals. But the radical agitation continued.

On October 1, 1791, the newly elected National Assembly convened. From the start the question of war dominated its activities. Ironically, both the right and the left in France saw advantage in a war between France and Austria. The king and his court hoped that military defeat would discredit the new regime and restore full power to the monarchy. Most Jacobins (members of the leading political club in Paris) were eager to strike down the foreign supporters of counter-revolution.

War against the Coalition

King Francis of Austria was determined to assist the French queen, his aunt, and also he hoped to achieve territorial gains for Austria. With both sides eager for battle, France went to war against a coalition of Austria, Prussia, and the émigrés in April 1792.

Each camp expected rapid victory, but both were deceived. The French offensive was quickly driven back, and soon invading armies were crossing French borders. The Legislative Assembly called for a special corps of 20,000 national guardsmen to protect Paris. King Louis vetoed the measure. This was, for all practical purposes, his last act as king. The Legislature also called for a levy of 100,000 volunteers to bolster the French army, and defend the homeland.

As Prussian forces began a drive toward Paris, their commander, the Duke of Brunswick, demanded that Paris surrender. The Duke threatened to level the city if it resisted or if it harmed the royal family. When Louis XVI published this Brunswick Manifesto, it seemed the final proof that he was in league with the enemy. Far from intimidating the revolutionaries, the threat drove them into action. Since the Legislative Assembly had refused to act decisively in the face of royal obstructionism, Parisian militants, spurred on by the Jacobin Club, organized an insurrection.

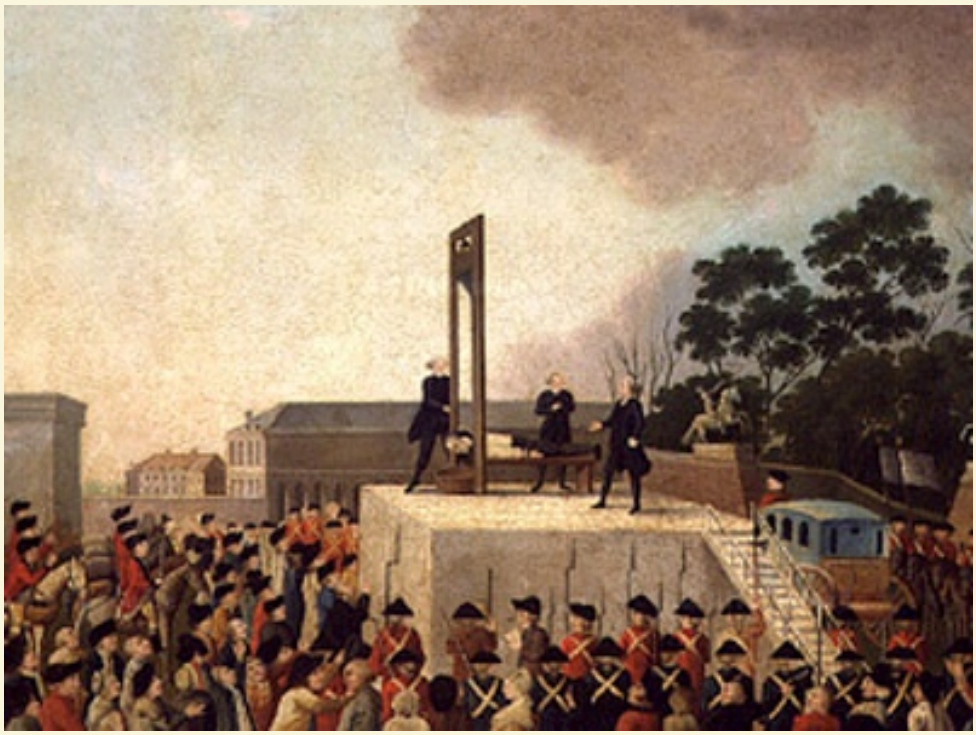
The Parisian Insurrection

On August 10, 1792, Parisians stormed the royal palace, literally driving the king from the throne. That night more than half of the members of the National Assembly fled Paris. The Assembly had lost its legitimacy. The representatives who remained prepared to dissolve the Assembly and ordered election of a new governing body — the National Convention.

In November the Convention declared that France would help all revolutionaries anywhere in Europe if they wanted to overthrow their government. Then in January 1793, it brought Louis XVI to trial for conspiring with the enemies of the country. On January 15 the National Convention found him guilty, on January 16 voted by a majority of one (and one voting for was the king's brother) to execute him, and on January 21 executed him on the guillotine, the new instrument of death (see print on next page).

The execution of the king did not mean that the revolution was at least settling down. In fact, it simply continued on its ever-growing spiral of violence.

In April 1793 the national convention created what it called a Committee of Public Safety to see to it that France defeated its enemies abroad and used all of the resources of France to do it. Let me read you that sentence over again. In other words, the Committee of Public Safety became the most powerful institution in France.



The Reign of Terror

And the committee had some interesting ideas. The first was how to get everyone behind the country in its fight against foreign powers: one does that by making sure that everyone agrees with the country's objectives, and one does that by executing anyone who does not agree with the country's objectives -- as interpreted by the Committee of Public Safety.

This led to what is called the Reign of Terror. It is associated with the most famous of the revolutionaries at this time, a man called Robespierre. It is hard to say how many people the government executed during the Reign of Terror, probably around 14,000 and murdered perhaps 25,000 more. And those executed were by no means former noblemen. One guy, who studied the executions during the Terror, has determined that the nobles numbered only 8.2%; the most were workers with 31.2% and peasants with 28.1%.

Enlightenment Gone Whacky

Robespierre and his Committee of Public Safety had more ideas than just executing people. One was the introduction for the first time of the draft, called the levee en masse. This meant that every adult male was liable for military service. First time that had happened since ancient times. Another was their introduction of the Cult of Reason. This one might say is the Enlightenment gone bad. The Committee abolished the worship of God and introduced ceremonies celebrating reason. This did not work out very well, and in 1794 the Committee changed it into the Worship of the Supreme Being.

A few other things: It changed the calendar, creating a year of 12 months, each with 30 days because it was more reasonable that way. The problem was that five days were left over at the end of each year so those were festival days. The week was ten days long, nine days of work and one day of holiday. Months were named after characteristics: July was called Thermidor because it was hot; August-September was called Fructidor because that was the time of the fist harvests; March-April was called Germinal because that was when stuff was planted. And the Committee introduced the metric system. All designed because it was much more reasonable.

The Thermidorean Reaction

As it happened, the coup against Robespierre and his associates was led by a group of dissident Jacobins, including members of the Committee of Public Safety. They had supported the Reign of Terror but feared Robespierre would turn on them next. On July 27, 1794 (9 Thermidor, Year II, in the revolutionary calendar), Robespierre and his close followers were arrested on the convention floor. During the next two days, Robespierre and 82 of his associates were guillotined.

Maximilien Robespierre

1758-1794

This represented a major turning point in the Revolution. Ever since 1789, moderates and conservatives had tried to reverse the Revolution. But it had continued to become more and more extreme in nature, driven by urban radicals and their allies. Only after 9 Thermidor did the Revolution reverse its radical direction. Now, at least for a time, moderates came to dominate the government.

While these moderates wanted to preserve the Revolution's achievements and tried to repress counter-revolutionaries, they also feared and repressed the radical groups who had placed the Jacobins in power. In order to maintain control over both the radical left and the counter-revolutionary right, the Thermidoreans consolidated their power and began to limit democracy.

Immediately after 9 Thermidor the new regime began to dismantle the Reign of Terror. Although the Convention continued in power until October 1795, the teeth of its political repression were pulled one by one. To limit their power, the various committees that had operated the Terror were restructured; thousands of prisoners were released; and in November 1794 the Paris Jacobin club was closed.

The Directory

To avoid a revival of either democracy or dictatorship, the Thermidoreans put together and ratified a new conservative constitution that limited the right to vote to the wealthiest 30,000 male citizens. The new constitution dispersed power among three main bodies. Legislative authority was vested in two legislative assemblies. Executive power was lodged in a five-man Directory chosen by the assemblies.

Just when it appeared that domestic peace might be restored, in September, 1797, three radical members of the Directory, the triumvirate, eliminated the two other members and purged the legislature of nearly 200 moderate deputies. They did all this with the backing of the army. The triumvirate was then joined by two new associates. This new Directory closed down counter-revolutionary publications, re-exiled returning émigrés and uncooperative clergy, and ruthlessly executed their political opponents.

So, the French Revolution continued. You will read more about it in your texts. Unlike the Glorious Revolution in England and the American Revolution, the French Revolution spiraled out of control and continued to do so, at the expense of domestic, and indeed, international tranquility, for nearly three decades. By the late 1790's most of the Old Regime were dead or in exile, but so were most of the leaders of the original Revolution of 1789. Among most French people there existed a general wish for a return to national stability and a strong, secure leadership. Next time we will look at the career of the General and Emperor who provided the latter, if not the former.

So What?

Why is it important to have some idea of the French revolution and how it unfolded? The reason is that the French revolution had a profound impact on western civilization right down to 1989. Until the fall of the communist system, American foreign policy was aimed at preventing revolution. For us the revolutionaries -- and therefore the bad guys -- were the Russians, but the reason revolution was feared long before the Russians learned how to do it was because of the French revolution. So, put down these five reasons why you should know about the French revolution:

Revolution and the fear of revolution become important parts of western civilization in all of its phases: politics, social development, and intellectual activity.

For some, revolution is good and should be encouraged. From 1789 on there were always revolutionaries eager to change things. And the French Revolution showed that one did not have to stop at things such as freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and all that stuff that the Americans stopped with. It showed that revolution could be used to create a completely new society -- AND kill those who are opposed to it.

For others, revolution is bad and must be resisted, with armed force if necessary. These people believed that those plotting revolution needed to be arrested and jailed. In some places people advocating change could be regarded as revolutionaries and must be stopped.

For those wanting to start a revolution and for those wanting to stop one, the French revolution is the example they both point to justify what they are doing.