

## Chapter VIII: The Age of the Enlightenment

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#### 36. The Philosophes--And Others

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##### A. The Spirit of Progress and Improvement:

1. In general the age was skeptical toward tradition; confident in the powers of human reason and science; convinced of the regularity and harmony of nature; and imbued with the sense of civilization's advance and progress.
2. Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns: Which time was the best?
3. Religion: God the Father vs God the First Cause, the Watchmaker: **Deism**
4. At odds with the general spirit of the age was a growth in religious feeling, as seen in the hymns of Watts and the music of Bach and Handel, as well as in the revivalist spirit of Pietism on the Continent, Methodism in England, and the Great Awakening in America.

Another dissonant note was sounded by the spirit of mystification, as evidenced by the theories of Lavater and Mesmer. The development of Freemasonry and the Illuminati provide a combination of these diverse trends.

##### B. The Philosophes

1. Narrow and broad definition of term
2. Spread of knowledge: newspapers and magazines, coffee houses and readings rooms, encyclopedias and dictionaries. Yet the age was also one of censorship, especially in France and Spain; that in France led to the development of a style of evasion. French salons became a major institution of pre-revolutionary France. The dominant form of the new spread of ideas was the *Encyclopedie* edited by Denis Diderot.
3. A unique characteristic of the age was the emergence of ruler philosophes, including Frederick the Great, Catherine the Great, and Joseph II of Austria (and perhaps Maria T.).

##### C. Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau

1. **Montesquieu (1689-1755)**
  - a. Landed aristocrat, part of anti-absolutist movement
  - b. *Spirit of the Laws: separation and balance of powers*
2. **Voltaire (1694-1778)**
  - a. Bourgeois origins, and known only for literature until 40
  - b. Trenchant, incisive, scurrilous, sarcastic; master of irony and ridicule
  - c. Admired, popularized English achievements (esp admiration for him)
  - d. Admired strong rulers, like Louis XIV and Frederick the Great
  - e. Écrasez l'infame : bigotry, intolerance, superstition--Catholic Church
  - f. Low opinion of mankind, favoring enlightened despotism for control
3. **Rousseau (1712-1778)**
  - a. Swiss, lower middle class; maladjusted "outsider"--never a "success"
  - b. Declared society to be artificial, corrupt, source of evils; "nature" was the source of all good--kindness, unselfishness, honesty--and preferred emotion and impulse to critical, rational thought.
  - c. *Social Contract*: (1) The contract was with the people and was both political and social; the individual surrendered his liberty, fusing his individual will into the General Will--which itself was the only true sovereign power. Kings or elected reps were only delegates of the People. \*(2) He "became the first systematic theorist of a conscious and calculated nationalism....he generalized and made applicable to large territories the psychology of small city republics--the sense of membership of community and fellowship, of responsible citizenship and intimate participation in public affairs--in short, of common will. All modern states, democratic or undemocratic, strive to impart this sense of moral solidarity to their peoples. Whereas in democratic states the General Will can in some way be identified with the sovereignty of the people, in dictatorships it becomes possible for individuals (or parties) to arrogate to themselves the right to serve as spokesmen and interpreters of the General Will. Both totalitarians and democrats have regarded Rousseau as one of their prophets." (3) His most influential works were novels, *Emile* and *Nouvelle Héloïse*, which spread a respect for the common man, a love of common things, a sense of human pity and compassion and a rejection of superficial aristocratic life. He developed a sense of humanitarianism that even touched M. Antoinette and her court.

D. Political Economists

1. Physiocrats: **Turgot** and Quesnay: *Laissez faire*
2. **Adam Smith:** *Wealth of Nations* (1776)
  - a. Function of government
  - b. Free Market: operation of supply and demand
  - c. The “invisible hand”: the operation of self-interest
  - d. “Lesser evils”: What were they?

E. Main Currents of Enlightenment Thought:

1. Divergent and contradictory, inconsistent currents of thought. Generally accepted beliefs; variations on religion, liberty, equality
2. France as the center of the Enlightenment, with England closing the gap
3. The state as the agency of progress: “rightly ordered government was considered to be the best guarantee of social welfare.”
4. Universalism: belief in the unity of mankind under a natural law of right and reason.

## 37. Enlightened Despotism: France, Austria, Prussia

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A. Enlightened Despotism

1. “Characteristically, the enlightened despots drained marshes, built roads and bridges, codified the laws, repressed provincial autonomy and localism, curtailed the independence of church and nobles, and built up a trained and salaried officialdom.” They differed from earlier kings in tempo and attitude, and justified their authority by their utility, as “first servants of the state.”
2. They were secular; they advocated religious toleration and were typically anti-Jesuit. They were also rational and reformist, impatient with outmoded custom and privilege--especially those rights of church, nobles, towns, guilds, provinces, assemblies of estates, or provinces --all referred to as “feudalism.”
3. Enlightened despotism was an acceleration of monarchy, justified in terms of reason and secular usefulness. It was largely an outgrowth of the Great War of the Mid-century all states, strove to augment revenues, by devising new taxes or taxing people or regions previously tax-exempt, and centralizing and renovating their political systems.

\*B. Failure in France:

1. **Louis XV** was indifferent to serious matters, with the attitude *après moi, la déluge*. The main problem was an unjust tax load, with the *taille*, a land tax paid by the peasants with nobles, the Church and many bourgeois exempt. The nation was rich, but the treasury was broke, and all attempts at reform failed. In 1748, the king, at the urging of Madame de Pompadour, appointed a finance minister who devised a new tax--which the aristocracy stopped. The enormous costs plus the humiliating reverses of the Seven Years War brought renewed interest in reform. An attempt was made to make laws uniform, end the old parliaments, and attack tax privilege, under Chancellor **Maupeou**; he established new parliaments with judges (with weakened powers) appointed by the Crown.
2. **Louis XVI** (1774-1792) was more serious and desired to govern well, but he lacked strength of will and did not wish to give offense. Unwilling to be called despot, he recalled the old parliaments, pacifying the aristocracy. He did appoint a reforming ministry under **Turgot**, a Physiocrat and philosophé--but the aristocrats forced his resignation in 1776. In 1778 France went to war with Britain to aid the US revolution and debts again rose.

C. Austria: Maria Theresa (1740-1780) and Joseph II (1780-1790)

1. Using a multi-national team of advisers, headed by Count Kaunitz, Maria Theresa moved to consolidate her empire. Hungary, strongly separatist, was left alone; Austria and Bohemia were welded together, but with the separate diets. Bureaucracy replaced local government, and moved to check brigandage, local guild monopolies, and produce a large free trade area. From humane motives, and to gain control of the manpower for her armies, M.T. launched a systematic, cautious attack on serfdom, freeing the serf from arbitrary exactions by feudal lords. She moved slowly, accepting partial measures, disinguing or understating her goals.
2. Joseph II wanted action now. A solemn, earnest, good man, he desired to change conditions quickly. The state should mean “the greatest good for the greatest number,” and he acted: equality of taxation, equality of punishment, reduction of cruel punishments, liberty of the press, religious toleration, and suppression of monasteries (using their property to improve Viennese hospitals). He centralized the state, limiting aristocratic power and local diets. “His ideal was a perfectly uniform and rational empire, with all irregularities smoothed out as if under a steam roller.” Administration was to be in German.

Bureaucracy was to be modernized, with training, promotion schedules, retirement, efficiency reports, inspectors. The clergy was to give full support. And a secret police was to watch over all.

3. **The result?** Joseph died a failure at 49, disillusioned and broken hearted, with Hungary and Belgium in revolution against him, an antagonized aristocracy, and an indignant Church. The new bureaucracy was unequal to the tasks that confronted it--and many were land-owners he had humiliated. "Joseph was a revolutionist without a party. He failed because he could not be everywhere and do everything himself. His reign demonstrated the limitations of a merely despotic enlightenment. It showed that a legally absolute ruler could not really do as he pleased. It suggested that drastic and abrupt reform could only come with a true revolution, on a wave of public opinion, and under the leadership of men who shared in a coherent body of ideas."
4. Joseph was succeeded by his brother Leopold, and then by Leopold's son Francis II. Leopold abrogated many of Joseph's edicts, and under Francis the aristocrats and clerics regained power, spurred on by the horrible spectacle of rev France.

D. Prussia under **Frederick the Great** (1740-1786)

Frederick saw himself as the "first servant of the state," whose job was to make his people happy. He simplified and codified the laws, and made the law courts speedier and more honest; his civil service in general was efficient and energetic. He gave religious toleration--a factor encouraging immigration. Society was strictly stratified, to preserve a distinct peasant class (for soldiers and an aristocracy (for officers). Peasants were serfs--unable to move or marry or learn a trade without permission--though abuses were rare. Frederick made all important decisions. He trained no successors, and twenty years later the Prussian state and army collapsed under the attack of Napoleon.

## 38. Enlightened Despotism: Russia

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A. Russia after Peter the Great

The Russian court and aristocracy adopted French as their conversational language, so French Enlightenment ideas did influence Russia. After Peter the Great, Russian military power expanded, and Russia joined against Prussia in the Seven Years War. The first powerful ruler was Catherine, a Romanov by marriage, who ruled from 1762 to 1796.

B. **Catherine the Great:** Domestic Program

1. Though German, Catherine quickly learned Russian and became Russ Orthodox after her marriage. She was practical, hearty, and boisterous--a worthy successor of Peter. She was intellectual, reading Blackstone (law) and corresponding with Voltaire and Diderot. She publicized her intention to make reforms, and worked to codify the laws, restricting torture, and increased religious toleration. She began to consolidate the machinery of state.
2. Any idea of reforming serfdom was ended by **Pugachev's rebellion** (1773). The muzhiks felt themselves oppressed and alienated by a "Frenchified" aristocracy. Pugachev, a Cossack and ex-soldier, announced he was the true tsar and began an insurrection--joined by Cossacks and the serfs of the Ural and Volga regions. Moscow aristocrats were terrified, but the rebels were stopped; Pugachev was betrayed and captured. Catherine's answer was repression, increasing the power of landlords. "As in Prussia, the state came more than ever to rest on an understanding between ruler and gentry." The gentry accepted the monarchy, with its laws, officials, army and foreign policy, and received in return full authority over the peasants. Landlords ruled the land.

C. Catherine the Great: Foreign Affairs

1. Catherine's main goal was to secure the loosely organized domains from the Baltic to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, the land of the Poles and Turks. She defeated the Turks, but was prevented from reaching her territorial goals by balance of power politics, receiving instead a portion of Poland in the first partition. But Russia did get Turkey's Tartar states on the north coast of the Black Sea, where the important port of Odessa was soon founded. The French Revolution gave her the opportunity to finish the partitions of Poland, in which Russia expanded to the limits of areas inhabited by White Russians and Ukrainians, for whom the Poles were merely landlords. Many "enlightened" thinkers praised Russia for eliminating Poland--a nuisance, a cause of rivalry. Edmund Burke saw the partitions as an end to the principle of balance of power, by which weak or small states were secured against "universal monarchy." A huge state simply disappeared, ended by cold diplomatic calculation. The partitions changed the balance of power as a whole, making eastern Europe more important. And Poland became the first case of modern revolutionary nationalism, a cause increasingly favored in the West but opposed by the reactionary states of the East.

D. The Limitations of Enlightened Despotism

1. Catherine probably could not have reformed serfdom, since she depended on the land-owning nobles.  
 “As Catherine wrote to Diderot on the subject of reforms: ‘You write only on paper, but I have to write on human skin, which is incomparably more irritable and ticklish.’” Major reform could easily have brought a revolt. But she remained attuned to the West; she raised her grandson, Alexander, to be an enlightened monarch, giving him a liberal Swiss philosophie as tutor. But we shall see what results that education had.
2. “Enlightened Despotism, seen in retrospect, foreshadowed an age of revolution and even signified a preliminary effort to revolutionize society by authoritative action from above.” The state became more powerful, and told people that special privileges were bad. Old and established rights were brought into question; customary and common law was pushed aside by authoritative legal codes. By opposing the special powers of the church and feudal interests, the state was moving toward legal equality. Yet even before the French Revolution, enlightened despotism had reached as far as it could go. Almost everywhere the result was an aristocratic, even feudal revival, and kings were again renewing ties with the Church. Enlightened despotism was the culmination of monarchy.

### 39. New Stirrings: The British Reform Movement

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#### A. Onset of the Age of “Democratic Revolutions”

Older privileged, feudal, ecclesiastical interests were threatened by a rev mood which grew out of failure to deal with the problems of society. All the rev movements were part of the great democratic movement, but all were based on local themes. **Most did not** seek universal male suffrage, question private property, seek a welfare state, or directly attack monarchy as such. **All shared** the demand for LIBERTY and EQUALITY, favored declarations of rights and written constitutions, proclaimed the “sovereignty of the people,” desired governments which were “responsible,” opposed elites of birth or privilege, and desired elections of reps by a body of voters. All were middle class movements, and sought to undermine established churches.

#### B. The English-Speaking Countries: Parliament and Reform

1. The British Empire was decentralized, with 31 governments and 15 million subjects. Englishmen were content after 1688; political literature was moderate. Parliament was supreme, and the king had to work through it. **George III**, (1760-1820), felt himself a patriot king and worked with Parliament through a faction known as the “**King’s Friends**” from 1770 to 1782. There was only one true party (Whigs), with several factions. The discontented, able to be heard through a free press, included the Irish, Dissenters, the “Commonwealth Men” (spiritual descendants of the Levellers), and finally a diverse and influential group seeking parliamentary reform.
2. Control of Parliament was through patronage (the granting of “places,” or jobs), the awarding of lucrative contracts. Political districts had been set in 1688 and remained unchanged: many populous areas were unrepresented, and some “**rotten boroughs**” had representatives but no populace. (Richard Price found that 5,723 men chose one-half Parliament). The press stimulated reform by reporting parliamentary debates. Whigs, led by **Edmund Burke**, a conservative reformer, wanted to reform the “place system and end sinecures and the granting of offices, ranks, and titles for political purposes. He favored a parliament independent and responsible--but not mathematically representative of the population. He wanted the land-owning interests to rule, bound only to conscience--not to king nor constituents. **William Pitt** by 1782 ended many abuses, but backlash against the French Revolution ended any hope of real change. American revolutionaries did pick up much support from people like Burke, not to mention many ideas, including the concept of the “despotism” of George III (see our Declaration of Independence).
3. The drift was to centralization, based on a need for revenues caused by the new nature of war. There is a clear relation between Maria Theresa’s revocation of the charter of Bohemia and George III’s revocation of the charter of Massachusetts.

#### C. Scotland, Ireland, and India

1. Scotland: After the rebellion of “45,” the British government moved into the Highlands to break the power of the clans--troops, new roads, law courts, taxation. Kilts and bagpipes were forbidden for a generation.
2. Ireland: remained quiet, but alienated. The American Revolution led the Irish to take the US side--and demand reform. In Britain’s wars with France, the Irish usually supported France and rose in rebellion. The British ended the separate status of Ireland; the Act of Union of 1801 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with one parliament.
3. India: in 1763, British posts in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta were independent, subordinate only to the East India Co in London. In 1773 Lord North secured the Regulating Act which restricted Company

power and created a single Governor General and supreme court in Calcutta. Warren Hastings was sent as Governor General-- and proved to be the main author of British supremacy in India.

## 40. The American Revolution

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### A. Background to the Revolution

1. The poor colonial effort in both the Seven Years War and the Rebellion of Pontiac convinced Britain that the colonials should pay more, since they only paid local taxes and typically evaded customs duties. The result was the Sugar Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765. The latter brought virulent opposition from the most articulate colonials --lawyers, journalists, businessmen--and was soon repealed. Next came the Townshend Duties, on paper, paint, lead, and tea imports--all finally dropped, except for tea.
2. The main argument was representation; the British argued that colonials were as well represented as the average Englishman (or Irish). In 1773 a great surplus of tea in India brought a tactic to mind: sell the colonials cheap (but taxed) tea. Colonial merchants, left out, began a boycott and brought about the Tea Party. The Brits overreacted with the "Intolerable Acts," resulting in fierce resistance. They showed that colonial interests would always come second and antagonized virtually all colonial interests.

### B. The War of American Independence

1. Americans *did* cooperate; the First Continental Congress was held in Philadelphia in 1774 and led to a boycott of British goods and ultimately to Lexington and Concord in 1775. The Second Continental Congress then named a commander-in-chief, raised an army, ordered an expedition to Quebec, and began negotiations with the French. Radicals pushed for independence; **Tom Paine's** pamphlet *Common Sense* derided the idea of a Continent ruled by an island. France began sending help, though it remained officially neutral--90% of colonial arms used at the crucial Battle of Saratoga were supplied by the French. After Saratoga (1778), French aid was open--with Spain and Holland joining the League of Armed Neutrality, angered at the British blockade. French money, ships, and troops were the key, especially with the Battle of Yorktown. The colonials only had to hold out; the British had to win, and could not. Political turmoil in Britain brought US independence by the Treaty of Paris, 1783. Canada became clearly British for the first time when 60,000 Loyalist refugees immigrated from the US. The US received all territory east to the Mississippi River, except Florida and a strip along the Gulf.

### C. Significance of the Revolution

Indirect cause of the French Revolution, which began a wave of European revolutions. Showed the weakness of the colonial system--as Adam Smith had also shown in 1776 with his *Wealth of Nations*. Provided an example of the new nationalism for subject peoples. Showed the practicability of many enlightenment ideas, notably constitutionalism, federalism, and limited government--ideas taken from the federal context and made "progressive." America remained a mirage, an ideal vision, a land of new opportunity unfettered by the past. It remained a symbol of the utopia for the common man.