

The Enlightenment

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant described the Enlightenment as “... man’s release from his self-inflicted immaturity,” meaning that people should use their reason without taking direction. His motto, *Sapere aude!* (“Dare to know!”) encouraged readers to challenge outdated traditions.

The Enlightenment was an intellectual “current” that flowed across Europe and beyond during the 18th century thanks to an explosion in printing and the widespread use of the French language. The thinkers, known as *philosophes*, applied ideas from advances in science (see pp.266–67) to change the way that people thought about government and society, seeking to replace superstition, tyranny, and injustice with reason, tolerance, and legal equality.

From 1750, a “republic of letters” emerged in Paris, aided by the existence of literary salons and the *Encyclopédie* (see right). “What does it mean to be free?” asked Francois-Marie Arouet—better known as Voltaire—probably the most famous *philosophe* of them all. “To reason correctly and know the rights of man. When they are well known, they are well defended.”

Questioning received wisdom led the *philosophes* to attack many things: general ignorance and intolerance;

outdated privilege among nobles and clergy; absolutism or tyranny in all its forms, such as the royal *lettres de cachet* that allowed anyone to be locked up without evidence; and the Church

(for encouraging superstition and persecution).

The Swiss thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau railed against moral decadence and inequality in his essays on *The Arts and Sciences* (1749) and on *Equality* (1755), which challenged basic Enlightenment beliefs by arguing that social progress had helped to corrupt human nature. His

bestselling novels *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761) and *Emile* (1762) tapped into a rich vein of “sentimentalism” and made him the darling of the chattering classes. But he soon found himself an isolated figure, in conflict with other *philosophes*.

Spreading ideas

The most influential tool for spreading Enlightenment values was the 28-volume *Encyclopédie*, which boasted an impressive array of contributors, including Jacques Turgot, Voltaire,

as Voltaire. He promoted the English legal system, religious toleration, and its constitutional monarchy as alternatives to French absolutism in his *Lettres Philosophiques* (1734); it was immediately banned.

ENGLISH ROOTS

Enlightenment thinkers adopted three English *philosophers* as their “patron saints”: Francis Bacon (1561–1626) for his development of scientific method based on experiment and observation; John Locke (1632–1704) for his political theory and empiricism (acceptance of knowledge based only on direct experience); and Isaac Newton (1643–1727) for his unifying scientific laws and discoveries.

FRANCIS BACON'S
“THE ADVANCEMENT
OF LEARNING”



This detailed scene from a pastry cook’s kitchen shows the various tasks involved in pastry making. The *Encyclopédie* paid particular attention to everyday professions, eager to preserve artisan skills and techniques for posterity.

Frontispiece for the first volume of the *Encyclopédie* or “Reasoned Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Trades.”



ENCYCLOPÉDIE, OU DICTIONNAIRE RAISONNÉ DES SCIENCES, DES ARTS ET DES MÉTIERS, PAR UNE SOCIÉTÉ DE GENS DE LETTRES.

Mis en ordre & publié par M. DIDEROT, de l'Académie Royale des Sciences & des Belles-Lettres de Prusse; & quant à la PARTIE MATHÉMATIQUE, par M. D'ALEMBERT, de l'Académie Royale des Sciences de Paris, de celle de Prusse, & de la Société Royale de Londres.

Tantum series juncturaque pollet,
Tantum de medio sumptis accedit honoris! HORAT.

TOME PREMIER.



A PARIS,

Chez
BRIASSON, rue Saint Jacques, à la Science.
DAVID l'aîné, rue Saint Jacques, à la Plume d'or.
LE BRETON, Imprimeur ordinaire du Roy, rue de la Harpe.
DURAND, rue Saint Jacques, à Saint Landry, & au Griffon.

M. DCC. LI.

AVEC APPROBATION ET PRIVILEGE DU ROY.

and Rousseau under the editorial guidance of Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert. Its aim was to assemble and disseminate all existing knowledge in clear, accessible prose and to educate public opinion by “changing accepted habits of thought.” Banned twice for its anti-Catholic tone, its survival relied on the support of the state censor.

A more effective way of spreading similar ideas was through satire. The

political theorist Montesquieu started this trend with *Lettres Persanes* (1721), which depicted French and European customs through the eyes of Persian visitors, poking fun at the Church, Court, and French society. Voltaire perfected it in *Candide* (1759), an account of a naïve young man’s adventures, by exposing the hypocrisies of the institutions and attitudes that he encountered.

BEFORE

The roots of the Enlightenment lay in the Renaissance and English political and intellectual culture.

HUMANISM

A cultural movement of the Renaissance

◀ 250–53, humanism laid the foundations for the Enlightenment by emphasizing the dignity and reason of man. Humanists such as the French moralist Michel de Montaigne wrote essays questioning anything and everything.

POLITICAL REFORMS

In 1688, the English king James II was overthrown and replaced by William III. Subsequent political reforms inspired French writers, such



MONTAIGNE'S "ESSAYS"

AFTER

The Enlightenment provoked both radical change and growing criticism of its ideas.

REVOLUTIONS

Increasing demands for political representation helped pave the way for the **American and French revolutions**. The Founding Fathers incorporated many of Montesquieu's political ideas, including the **separation of powers**, into the US constitution **298–99** >>. However, in France, a combination of revolutionary wars and the "Terror" **302–03** >> served to **dissolve Enlightenment optimism** in a sea of blood.

ROMANTIC BACKLASH

Enlightenment ideas were so widespread by the second half of the 18th century that few failed to share confidence in the "Cult of Reason." But the 19th-century Romantic movement **338–39** >> emphasized emotion, imagination, and a love of nature over reason and industrial progress.

ENLIGHTENED MODERNITY

After the horrors of World War II **392–403** >>, the United Nations (UN) was founded in 1949 to resolve international relations based on the Enlightenment idea of **universal citizenship**. In practice, the self-interest of modern nation states often comes first.



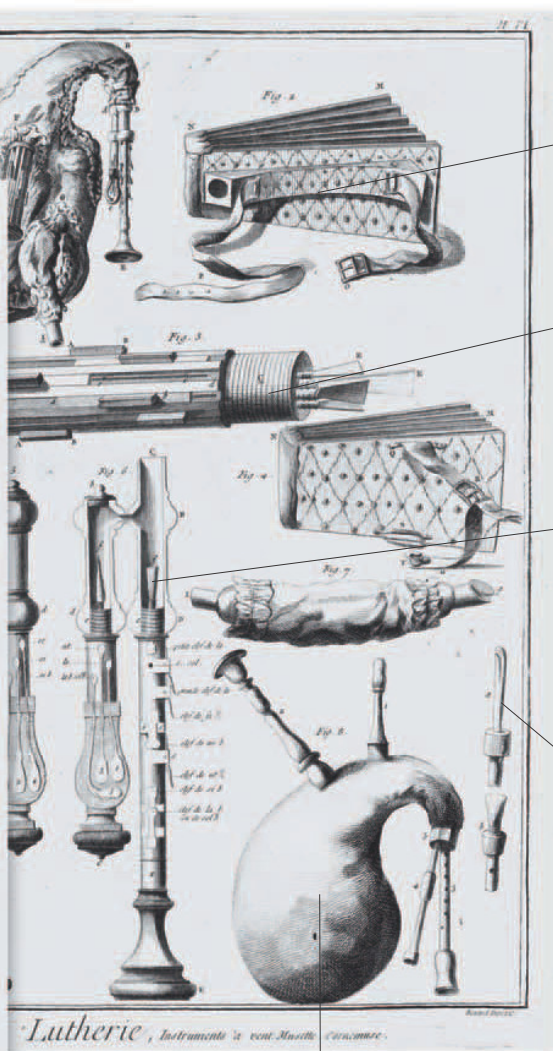
UNITED NATIONS

The **soufflet** was a type of bellows to which a sound-producing object such as a chanter (see below) could be attached.

The **four-reed drone** fitted onto the *musette de cour* shown above it; a type of bellows-blown bagpipe. Finger-holes were uncovered by moving sliders.

The **chanter** fitted onto the end of the *musette*. With three keys and seven finger-holes, it gave a range of one octave; annotation relates each finger-hole to its note.

Other **mouthpieces** for the bagpipes are illustrated—the editors intended the engravings to be as comprehensive as possible.



The **tools of the trade** of a pastry cook (*patissier*) are shown here, including bowls of varying sizes, a baking tray, a mortar and pestle, and a rolling pin.

A **fully inflated cornemuse** (a type of bagpipes) shows the positioning of the mouthpiece, fingering tubes, and venting tube.

Detailed legends precede each set of labeled plates, which are grouped by themes, such as artisans and musical instruments.



One of the most popular targets of the *philosophes* was the Church, which some saw as one of the main obstacles to reform. They argued that for states to be progressive, politics and religion should be kept apart. Yet many also believed that religion was necessary for upholding the social order, creating an insoluble conflict. Anticlerical sentiments, spread by satirical prints and novels, were fueled by anger at the Church's corruption and abuse of power. Freemasons lodges sprang up across Europe as secular spaces for disciples of the "Cult of Reason" to gather and exchange ideas.

The other main target was royal absolutism. The French king and his ministers were often in dispute with

the *parlements*—French law courts dominated by the aristocracy. Montesquieu transformed the political debate by proposing, in his bestselling treatise *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), a limited monarchy based on a three-way division of powers between the executive (king), the legislature (parliament), and the judiciary. This was a time when thinkers believed that a rational, scientific approach could be applied to almost any subject. Scotsman Adam Smith's analysis of capitalism, in his book *Wealth of Nations* (1776), invented the new science of economics, while Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) presented a more scientific approach to philosophy and knowledge.

“The consent of **the people** is the **sole basis** of a government's authority.”

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, "THE SOCIAL CONTRACT," 1762



IDEA

ENLIGHTENED DESPOTISM

Enlightenment ideas on the state, attacking outdated traditions, filtered down to some of Europe's rulers, including Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, Catherine II "the Great" of Russia, and Frederick II "the Great" (left) of Prussia, who briefly employed Voltaire as his advisor. Frederick tried to govern his subjects as the "first servant of the state." His "revolution from above" created an enlightened welfare state with a modern bureaucracy and law system, transforming Prussia into a semiconstitutional state. Prince Karl Frederick of Baden went one step farther, abolishing serfdom outright.