The Enlightenment

*Human Legacy,*
Chapter 19.2, Pages 574-579
The Age of Reason

“The Scientific Revolution convinced many European thinkers about the power of reason. With the scientific method and reason, scientists had made countless discoveries about the physical world. Could Reason be used to study human nature and society as well?

In the 1600s a new generation of Philosophers began to view reason as the best way to understand the truth. They came to the remarkable conclusion that reason could be used to solve all human problems. This exciting time of optimism and possibility is now called the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason.”

~Human Legacy, page 574.
Two Key Concepts of Enlightenment Thinkers

**Social Contract**
- Thomas Hobbes
  - Government provides safety & stability
  - Citizens obey the laws
  - Contract may not be changed
- John Locke
  - Government protects the natural rights of the people
  - People may change the government if it does not fulfill the contract
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau
  - Contract is among all citizens
  - Citizens mutually agree to respect the natural rights of each person

**Natural Rights**
- All human beings possess certain rights regardless of their society
  - No government or individual may lawfully take away these rights
- People are allowed to defend their natural rights by any means
- These rights generally consist of **Life, Liberty & Property**
Stimulus of the Enlightenment

• Educated people
  – Members of the bourgeoisie and some nobility
  – Wrote & published ideas in books, magazines & pamphlets
  – Broader exchange of ideas thanks to the **Printing Press**

• Paris
  – Center of European cultural and intellectual thought thanks to Louis XIV

• **Salons**
  – Coffee shops & private residences where intellectuals met to read each other’s work and exchange ideas
  – Usually hosted by women
  – Open by invitation but ignored social rank
New Views on Government

“As the enlightenment began, European thinkers began looking for ways to apply reason in order to improve the human condition. Some of these thinkers began to examine the organization of government.”

~Human Legacy, page 575.
Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

- Published the *Leviathan* in 1661
  - Heavily influenced by the chaos of the English Civil War 1649-1660
  - Advocated a strong central government to maintain law & order

- Thought people were naturally selfish, greedy & violent

- **Social contract** between people & government
  - People give up freedoms in exchange for safety
  - Social contract may not be changed
  - Absolute monarchy is the best form of government
John Locke (1632-1704)

• Believed that people were naturally reasonable

• **Social contract** between people & government

• Purpose of government is to protect the **natural rights** (life, liberty & property) of the people
  – People may change or overthrow the government if it fails to protect these natural rights

• Publishes *Two Treatises on government* in 1690s
  – Proposes separation of powers
    • Legislative, executive & judicial
  – Basis of U.S. Constitution
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

- Believed that people were best in a “state of nature”
  - People born good
  - Society corrupts
  - Admired Native American Society

- Social contract between all individuals in a state

- Publishes *The Social Contract*
  - “Man is born free but is everywhere in chains”

- Believed government should work for the “common good”
  - Collective will of the people
  - All people should be socially & politically equal (except women)
Baron de Montesquieu

- One of the few members of the nobility who supports democratic reforms
- Believed in the Separation of Powers
  - Furthers John Locke’s work
  - Advises a system of checks & balances
- Publishes *The Spirit of the Laws* 1748
  - Admires English system of government
  - Heavily influences the U.S. government
New Views on Society

“While some Enlightenment philosophers focused their attentions on government, others chose to deal with issues in society, such as religious toleration, women’s rights, and economic systems.”

~*Human Legacy*, page 576.
Voltaire

• Known for his Satire
  – *Candide* is his most famous work
• Attacked injustice, superstition & ignorance
• Advocated religious tolerance & freedom of the press/speech
• Believed that an **Enlightened Despot** was the best form of government
  – The absolute monarch could best protect the natural rights of the people
  – Personal friend of Frederick II (king of Prussia)
Diderot and the *Encyclopedia*

- Believed the expansion of human knowledge was the most important goal for humanity
- Published 28 volume *Encyclopedia* in 1772
  - Articles on government, art, science & religion
  - Represented the “sum of Human Knowledge”
- Criticized the Church, Government & French Legal system
Mary Wollstonecraft

• English Writer who lives in Paris
  – Supported French Revolution
• Published *Vindication of the Rights of Women* 1792
  – Supports equal education for women
  – Feels that people should strive for virtue & ignore reputation
  – Attacked the idea of separate spheres for men & women
  – Husband & wife should be equal partners
Adam Smith

- Scottish Economist
  - Father of capitalism
- Published *The Wealth of Nations* 1776
- Supports *Laissez-faire* economics
  - Free markets regulated by supply & demand
  - Government should not interfere with business
  - Businessmen will always seek to maximize profits and government regulation will only slow this down
- Wealth & Power of country is measured by trade not gold reserves
Enlightenment Ideas Spread

“The spirit of optimism and change was not confined to the salons and the coffeehouses of Europe. Enlightenment ideas quickly spread throughout Europe to Prussia, Russia, Austria and Beyond. Many philosophes appealed directly to European monarchs for change. As a result, a few monarchs developed a system of government in which they ruled according to Enlightenment ideas. These monarchs became known as enlightened despots.”

~Human Legacy, page 578.
Prussia

• Frederick II rules 1740-1786
  – Frederick is an **enlightened despot**
  – Personal friend of Voltaire
  – Plays the flute & write poetry himself
  – Primary interest is to build the military & economic power of Prussia

• Frederick’s reforms
  – Abolishes torture as a punishment
  – Reduces censorship
  – Establishes elementary education
  – Promotes religious tolerance (but not for Jews)
Russia

• Catherine II (rules 1762-1796)
• Corresponds with Voltaire & Diderot
• Promises many reforms but delivers on few promises
• Concentrates on increasing the power of the Russian government
Austria

- Joseph II rules 1780-1790
- Known as the “peasants’ emperor”
  - Tries to improve the fortunes of the common people
- Resisted by the Nobility & the Catholic Church
- Reforms
  - Eliminated torture as punishment
  - Provides food & medical treatment for the poor
  - Grants religious tolerance to Catholics, protestants & Jews
  - Abolishes serfdom
  - Requires peasants to pay for their labor
Later Times and Places

- Enlightenment thinkers question traditional ideas on Government, education, society & religious freedoms
- Believed that human reason could solve social problems
- Influenced the American Revolution & Constitution
- Were one of the causes of the French Revolution