

## The Age of Enlightenment (PT: Iluminismo)



Reading of Voltaire's tragedy of the Orphan of China in the salon of Marie Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin, by Lemonnier

The **Age of Enlightenment** (also known as the “**Age of Reason**” or simply “**The Enlightenment**”) was an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated the world of ideas in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. It emerged from a movement called “Renaissance humanism” and was preceded by the “Scientific Revolution” and the work of Francis Bacon. Some say that the Enlightenment began in 1637 when René Descartes stated his philosophy of “Cogito, ergo sum” (“I think, therefore I am”), while others say that the publication of Isaac Newton's “**Principia Mathematica**” (1687) was the culmination of the Scientific Revolution and the beginning of the Enlightenment. French historians claim that it began with the death of Louis XIV of France in 1715.

Philosophers and scientists of that time spread their ideas through meetings at scientific academies, Masonic lodges, literary salons, coffee houses and in printed books, journals, and pamphlets. The ideas of the Enlightenment challenged the authority of the monarchy and the Catholic Church and made the foundations for the political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries. A variety of 19th-century movements, including **liberalism** and **neoclassicism**, trace their intellectual heritage to the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment included many ideas like “reason” and “the evidence of the senses” as the primary sources of knowledge and advanced ideals such as liberty, progress, toleration, fraternity, constitutional government and the separation of church and state. In France, the main teachings of the philosophers were “individual liberty” and “religious tolerance”, which were in opposition to an absolute monarchy and the fixed dogmas of the Church.

The Enlightenment was marked by an emphasis on scientific methods and reductionism, together with a challenge to religious orthodoxy - an attitude captured by Immanuel Kant's essay “What is Enlightenment?”, where the phrase “Sapere aude” (“Dare to know”) was written.

Enlightenment ideas were deeply influential on politics. European rulers, such as Catherine II of Russia, Joseph II of Austria and Frederick II of Prussia, tried to apply Enlightenment thought on religious and political tolerance, which became known as “Enlightened Absolutism”. Many of the main political and intellectual figures behind the American Revolution associated themselves closely with the Enlightenment. Benjamin Franklin visited

Europe many times and contributed actively to the scientific and political debates there, and took the newest ideas back to Philadelphia. Thomas Jefferson closely followed European ideas and later incorporated some of the ideals of the Enlightenment in the "Declaration of Independence". James Madison incorporated many of the ideals in the "United States Constitution" in 1787. The ideas of the Enlightenment also inspired the French Revolution, which began in 1789.

### **Who were the instigators?**

The Age of Enlightenment was preceded by, and closely associated with, the Scientific Revolution. Earlier philosophers whose work influenced the Enlightenment included **Francis Bacon** and **René Descartes**. Some of the major figures of the Enlightenment included **Cesare Beccaria**, **Denis Diderot**, **David Hume**, **Immanuel Kant**, **Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz**, **John Locke**, **Montesquieu**, **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**, **Adam Smith**, **Hugo Grotius**, **Baruch Spinoza** and **Voltaire**.

### **What were the publications?**

One particularly influential Enlightenment publication was the "**Encyclopédie**" ("Encyclopedia"). Published between 1751 and 1772 in thirty-five volumes, it was compiled by Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, and a team of 150 other intellectuals. The Encyclopédie helped to spread the ideas of the Enlightenment across Europe and beyond. Other important publications included Voltaire's "**Letters on the English**" (1733) and "**Dictionnaire philosophique**" ("Philosophical Dictionary") (1764); Hume's "**A Treatise of Human Nature**" (1740); Montesquieu's "**The Spirit of the Laws**" (1748); Rousseau's "**Discourse on Inequality**" (1754) and "**The Social Contract**" (1762); Adam Smith's "**The Theory of Moral Sentiments**" (1759) and "**The Wealth of Nations**" (1776); and Kant's "**Critique of Pure Reason**" (1781).

### **In which areas were Enlightenment ideals applied?**

- Philosophy
- Science
- Sociology
- Economics
- Law
- Politics
- Religion
- Culture
- Arts
- Education
- Natural History

**Source:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age\\_of\\_Enlightenment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment)