The Age of Enlightenment

The Enlightenment - Eighteenth-Century Elite Culture - Popular Culture

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Introduction

- During the eighteenth century, the great scientific and philosophical innovations of the previous century evolved into a naturalistic worldviews divorced from religion.
- Scientific knowledge and religious skepticism, previously the concerns of an extremely narrow group of learned people, entered the consciousness of Europe’s elites in a way that would have startled Descartes or Newton.
- Displacing the authority of religion with that of reason, the new outlooked offered an optimistic vision of future progress in human affairs.
- Know as the Enlightenment, this movement formed the intellectual foundation for a new sense of modernity.
Many important eighteenth-century intellectuals no longer believed in Christianity and wished to reduce its influence on society.

They argued that there was no divine standard of morality, no afterlife to divert humanity from worldly concerns.

These writers developed a strong sense of their own capacity to ignore traditional authority and guide society toward change.

The evolution of cultural institutions and the media of the day gave these writers and increasingly wide forum.

They had scant interest in or understanding of the vibrant popular culture around them and their growing belief in “public opinion” referred solely to the educated elites of the aristocracy and the middle classes.
Timeline of Events

1738- Voltaire, *Elements of the Philosophy of Newton*

1740- Richardson, *Pamela*

1746- Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*

1749- Buffon, *Natural History of the Earth, Vol. 1*

1752- Diderot, *Encyclopedia, Vol. 1*

1761- Rousseau, *Emile*

1762- Rousseau, *Social Contract*

1764- Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*

1772- Completion of Diderot’s *Encyclopedia*

1774- Goethe, *Sorrows of Young Werther; Habsburg School Ordinance*

1778- Death of Voltaire

1780s- Jacques-Louis David’s neoclassical masterpieces

1781- Joseph II’s Edict of Toleration

1792- Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
The Enlightenment

- In the eighteenth-century intellectuals believed that human behaviour and institutions could be studied rationally and that their faults could be corrected.
- They saw themselves as participants in a movement, which they called the Enlightenment, that could make educated men and women more rational, tolerant, and virtuous.
- An ideology of progress and freedom gradually took shape.
- Renowned writers such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau produced a steady flow of remarkable works across a wide range of subjects, which governmental censorship could not suppress.
The Broadening Reverberations of Science

The Popularization of Science

- While eighteenth-century scientists pondered the cosmologies of Descartes and Newton, nonscientists in England and on the Continent applied these methodologies of Descartes and Newton, and the philosopher John Locke to other realms of human thought.
- They fused the notion of methodical doubt and naturalistic explanations of phenomena into a scientific or mathematical spirit.
- They attempted to popularize scientific method, with the aim of transforming the values of Western civilization.
- A more calculating and ambitious propagandist of the scientific spirit was the Frenchman Francois-Marie Arouet, who wrote under the pen name of Voltaire and is virtually synonymous with the Enlightenment.
Popularizations of scientific method stimulated public interest in science, as mathematicians, cartographers, and astronomers made notable advances in their fields.

**Natural History**

- The science of the earth’s development, a combination of geology, zoology, and botany.
- This field of study was easy for the nonscientist to appreciate.
- G.L. Buffon produced a multivolume *Natural History of the Earth* between 1749 and 1778.
- G.L. Buffon, went beyond previous attempts to classify the data of nature and provided both a description and a theory of the earth’s development.
- Buffon’s earth did not derive from a singular act of divine creation that would explain the origins of human beings.
Beyond Christianity

- The erosion of biblical revelation as a source of authority is one hallmark of the Enlightenment.
- This shift derived some of its impetus from seventeenth-century scientists and liberal theologians who were themselves believing Christians but who opposed religious superstition.
- They had hoped to accommodate religion to new philosophical standards and scientific formulations by eliminating the superstitious imagery that could make religion seem ridiculous and by treating the world of nature as a form of revelation in which God’s majesty could be seen.
- They hoped to bolster the Christian religion by deemphasizing miracles and focusing on reverence for the Creator and on the moral teachings of the Bible.
- Their approach did indeed help educate people adhere to Christianity during the eighteenth century.
Toleration

- One current of thought that encouraged a more secular outlook was the idea of toleration, as propounded by the respected French critic Pierre Bayle.
- Bayle’s *Critical and Historical Dictionary* (1697) put the claims of religion to the test of critical reason.
- Bayle’s chief target was Christianity’s attempts to impose orthodoxy at any cost.
- Bayle advocated complete toleration, which would allow any person to practice any religion or none at all.
- An individual’s moral behaviour rather than his or her creed is what mattered, according to Bayle.
The most striking success of the eighteenth-century campaign for toleration came with the Edict of Toleration issued by the Habsburg emperor Joseph II on his ascendancy to the throne in 1781.

He recognized the right to Protestants and Jews in his realm to worship freely and to hold property and public office.

Joseph also tried to reduce the influence of Catholic Church by ordering the dissolution of numerous monasteries on the grounds that they were useless and corrupt.

**Deism**

Voltaire became the Enlightenment’s most vigorous antireligious polemicist.

This prolific writer was one of the century’s most brilliant literary stylists, historians, and poets but he was also a dedicated antagonist of Christianity.

His ultimate target was Christianity itself which he declared, “every sensible man, every honorable man must hold in horror.”
Voltaire’s masterpiece, a bestseller called The Philosophical Dictionary (1764), had to be published anonymously and was burned by the authorities in Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands.

He believed that religious superstition inevitably bred fanaticism and predictably resulted in bloody episodes like the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre.

He hoped that educated Europeans would abandon Christianity in favour of deism, a belief that recognized God as the Creator but held that the world, once created, functions according to natural laws without interference by God.

For deists, religion should be a matter of private contemplation rather than public worship and mythic creeds.

Broad-minded clergy could accept many of the arguments of eighteenth-century science and philosophy, but they could not accept deism.
The Philosophes

-a group of French intellectuals: science & secularism

-Vanguard: men who raised The Enlightenment to a self conscious movement

-Became the aristocracy and the middle class
  -writers, mathematicians, magistrates, government officials

-Their kinship extended to Scotland, Germany, Italy and even America
Intellectual Freedom

- critical spirit: the desire to reexamine the assumptions of society
- tests of reason, experience, and utility
- turning away from Faith, and going against religion
- they put human beings at the center of thought: noisy public movement
Persecution and Triumph

- appeared to be clamorous: battling entrenched authority

- published their work clandestinely and anonymously

- sometimes pushed into making humiliating public apologies, books confiscated or burned

- some were sent to jail or forced into exile

- By the 1770s, they survived their war with authorities, some ideas became widely accepted

- Even if contribution to Western Experience was small, fight for freedom will be remembered
Pioneering in Social Sciences

-Produced scholarly writings: invention of social science

- studied culture, social institutions, governments

-Studied the theoretical foundations of social organizations (Sociology)

--Studied the workings of the human mind (Psychology)

-Embedded their study of social science in questions of morality and ethics

-Enlightenment Ethics: utilitarian - social utility should be public morality

- are human values absolute or eternal?
Political Liberty

-Spirit of Laws: comparing government and societies

-Relativism: analyzing government in relation to special customs, climate, religion, and commerce of various countries - no single ideal model of government exists (Montesquieu)

-His followers thought that a society free of despotism was privilege to their members
Liberal Economics

- Transformed economic theory with attacks on mercantilism and government regulations

- Economic progress depended on freeing agriculture and trade free restrictions

- Land was the only source of wealth: called for reforms in the tax structure

- Fought for grain trade: to operate according to supply and demand to maintain the supply of it and to remain at fair prices

- Higher prices meant increased productivity: grain shortages could be solved at the price of temporary hardship for consumers
The Diderot and The Encyclopedia

- Not only new intellectual spirit, but a wide range of critical writings

- They created a single work that exemplified how their notion of knowledge could be useful: Diderot’s Encyclopedia

- Denis Diderot wrote many plays, novels, treatises in Mathematics, moral philosophy, and critical essays on religion

- He examined the role of human personality, human nature, and the role of sexuality

- Eventually his work got him in jail, and only released after a public apology

- He was then approached by a publisher to translate a British Encyclopedia, which he was then able to write entirely again in the interest of the Philosophes
Encyclopedia

- All fields of knowledge from the most theoretical to the most mundane

- The ultimate purpose was to change the way of thinking

- Religion was treated with an artful satire in this publication: because it could not be scarcely ignored nor openly attacked

- Science was the focus on the encyclopedia, with emphasis on technology and the practical side of science
  
  - machines, tools, manufacturing process

  - benefits of efficient production

  - valuable realms of knowledge compared to theoretical sciences (math & physics)

- Major political concerns of the editors: civil rights, freedom of speech, and the rule of law
The Encyclopedias Impact

- “A revolution in the minds of men to free them from prejudice.”
- Banned by French government in 1759 and revoked booksellers license to issue the remaining volumes
- “There is a project formed, a society organized to propagate materialism, to destroy religion, to inspire a spirit of independence and to nourish the corruption of morals.” - Attorney General of France
- Diderot went underground and continued to create the volumes which were sent to subscribers
- The persecutions by the French government receded eventually and the Encyclopedia was reprinted in cheaper conditions (legally and illegally)
- Sold out quickly and made a lot of money
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

- French philosopher
- Wrote a critique on the enlightenment and about status quo
- Found society more oppressive than other philosophers
- Wrote a prize-winning essay on “Has the restoration of arts and sciences had a purifying effect on morals”. He argued no because cultural and scientific achievements of the past decade caused pretension, conformity and useless luxury.
- Thought return of simpler times would be best - self reliant independent individuals.
- Against returning to the state of nature and the condition of anarchy in these times
- Rousseau’s rebellious life and his writings impressed the generation of readers in the 1770s and 1780s because of his quarrel with the repressive authorities of church and state. He also attacked pretensions of his fellow philosophers.
Works of JJ Rousseau

Julie or the new Heloise (1761)

- Julie falls in love with her tutor but eventually ends up marrying another man
- She raises her children in an exemplary way and ends up sacrificing her life for one of them
- Her old tutor and continues her children’s education after her death
- Story about morals, motherhood, love and virtue

Emile, or Treatise on Education (1762)

- Young boy raised to be a moral adult by a tutor
- Tutor emphasized experience over book-learning
- individual self development
- This new type of man required a wife attuned to practical matters and without vain aristocratic pretenses
- Sophie - the wife. Received a limited education compared to her husband

Women held a subordinate position - their virtues were domestic while males were prepared for public roles
The Social Contract (1762) became famous after the French dramatized issues the book raised.

Denied the idea that some people are meant to govern and others to obey.

Instead, individuals have a role in making the law to which they submit. By obeying it, they are thus obeying themselves and their fellow individuals.

For such an ideal society, each citizen would take part in making the Social Contract laying out society’s ground rules. In doing so, citizens would establish themselves as “the sovereign”.

Creates a government that will carry on the day-to-day business of applying the laws.

Rousseau believed that the best interest of the community must be every individual's best interest since they are a member of the community.

Called this “general will”.

To Rousseau individual freedom depended on a political framework involving consent and participation as well as subordination of individual self-interest to the commonwealth.
Eighteenth-Century Elite Culture

- This time period also saw an increase in publishing activity both legal and underground which served diverse audiences.
- New salons and freemasons lodges combined with new media to create a “public sphere”.
- Literature saw innovation - rise of the novel
- However, majority of Europe’s peasants and workers remained untouched by these developments.
- Europeans started to travel across the continent to see the largest cities.
- Plazas, public gardens, theatres and operas were being created in towns by their leader.
- Toward the end of the century street lighting and public transport began appearing in a few cities.
- The coffeehouse and storefront window display became part of the urban scene
Eighteenth-Century Elite Culture

- Community to which people of talent would belong.
- Organized around the salons and the academies.
- Both institutions encouraged social interchange by bringing together socially prominent men and women with talented writers.
- The philosophes exemplified social mixture because their group was composed of both nobles and commoners.
The Salons and Masonic Lodges

- Usually led/organized by women of wealthy families
- Bring together important writers with the influential persons they needed for favours and patronage.
- For example, the salon of Madame Tencin helped launch Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* in the 1740s.
Publishing and Reading

- The 18th century saw a notable rise in publishing several kinds of readers
- Traveling libraries that originated from England (1740) opened untapped markets for reading material
- By the end of the century almost 1000 traveling libraries had been established
“Bad Books”

- The demand for books and the dynamism of the publishing industry created new employment opportunities for men and women.
- Although the number of writers swelled, relatively a few could achieve financial independence without patronage.
- But many remained poverty stricken and very frustrated.
Johann von Goethe (1749-1832) lived through the beginnings and high point of the Romantic Movement

- inspired literary movement called Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) which emphasized strong artistic emotions and early imitations of the Romantic temperament

The Symphony: supreme form of entertainment

- development of the symphony paralleled the rise of the novel in literature

The heartland of Europe’s music traditions shifted to Austria

- Haydn & Mozart altered the symphonic form from three to four movements
  - achieved harmonic virtuosity and restrained emotionalism to their music
  - changed the symphony from the elegant trifles of earlier years
The Symphony

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The Social Context of Art

- painters were overshadowed by their predecessors
- neoclassicism remained a popular style with themes of antiquity and timeless conceptions of form and beauty
- the social context of painting started to change: the public were starting to claim a role in judging talent in visual arts
- The Royal Academy of Art (France) created an opening for this new voice by sponsoring a public exhibition ran annually that began in 1737
- David and Greuze, brilliant painter in neoclassical style with paintings conveying yearning for civic virtue and patriotism
David and Greuze

The Oath of the Horath /Jacques-Louis David

The Father’s Curse /Jean-Baptiste Greuze 1777
Popular Culture

- culture meant recreation and generally was public and collective
- literacy rates were low and although popular culture came in written forms, much of it was the oral traditions in forms of songs, proverbs, and folktales
- could suggest the rich variety of recreational and sociability practices were among the working class: artisans, peasants, etc.
Popular Literature

- Gentleman’s Magazine existed in a specific world of literature
  - consumed by journeymen and peasants, sold by travelling peddlers on cheap paper for a few pennies; read out loud by those who could read

3 major forms of literature:

- Religious material: devotional tracts, saint’s lives, Bible stories, etc.
- Almanacs: types of potions for illnesses, astrology, other signs of the future
- Entertainment: fables, tales, crude satires, mixtures of fiction and history
Oral Tradition

- spoken literature of folktales told fireside on nights from generation to generation; said to tell be conventional wisdom of the people
- Common themes: hunger, sex, oppression, etc.
- Songs and tales expressed joy or ordinary people but also represented hardships and danger in everyday life
- also celebrated shrewdness and the cunning of ordinary people struggling for survival
- in the spirit of the saying ‘better a knave than a fool’
Literacy and Primary Schooling

- Protestantism explicitly promoted literacy so that Christians could read their Bibles directly.
- The Catholic Church believed that the spread of literacy would serve its cause in the battle against heresy.

Primary Education

- Schooling was supposed to maintain the social order and reinforce the family in promoting piety and decent behaviour among the young.
- Many among the elites were skeptical about the value of education for peasants and laborers.
- Education could seem a waste of time when their children could be contributing to the family’s livelihood.
Schooling in Central Europe

- The Habsburg monarchy promoted primary education and thereby became the first Catholic realm to do so.
- The Habsburg General School Ordinance of 1774 authorized state subsidies, in combination with local funds, for the support of a school in almost every parish.
  - Attendance was supposed to be compulsory, though the state had no way to enforce it.
  - The state also intended to train future teachers as institutions called normal schools.
Sociability and Recreation

- If the educated elites had their salons, masonic lodges, and learned academies, the common people also formed organized cultural groups.
- For example, Artisans belonged to secret societies that combined fraternal and trade-union functions.
  - Young, unmarried artisans frequently traveled the country and stopped periodically to work with comrades in other towns to hone their skills.
  - Also relied on their associations for camaraderie and ritual celebrations.

Taverns and Festivals

- Corresponding to the coffee houses of the urban middle classes were the taverns in working-class neighborhoods.
- The urban common people were first beginning to consume wine in the eighteenth century, still something of a luxury except in its cheapest watered form.
Local festivals were particularly comfortable setting for single young men and women to meet each other.

In early modern Europe, gentlefolk and commoners had been accustomed to mixing in recreational and religious settings: markets and fairs, sporting events, village or town festivals.

Social status was based on birth or wealth, but cultural taste was becoming its behavioural marker.