UNIT 2: 18th CENTURY AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

**MAIN IDEA:** A revolution in intellectual activity changed Europeans’ view of government and society.

**WHY IT MATTERS NOW:** Freedoms and some forms of government in many countries today are a result of Enlightenment thinking.

The Enlightenment was a sprawling intellectual, philosophical, cultural, and social movement that spread through Europe during the 1700s. Enabled by the Scientific Revolution, which had begun as early as 1500.

**SETTING THE STAGE.** The influence of the **Scientific Revolution** (The Scientific Revolution was a new way of thinking about the natural world. That way was based upon careful observation and a willingness to question accepted beliefs) soon spread beyond the world of science. Philosophers admired Newton because he had used reason to explain the laws governing nature. People began to look for laws governing human behavior as well. They hoped to apply reason and the scientific method to all aspects of society – government, religion, economics, and education. In this way, the ideas of the Scientific Revolution paved the way for a new movement called the **Enlightenment**, or the Age of Reason. This movement reached its height in the mid-1700’s.

**TWO VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT:** The Enlightenment started from some key ideas put forth by two English political thinkers of the 1600’s, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Both men experienced the political turmoil of England early in that century. However, they came to very different conclusions about government and human nature.

**Hobbes’s Social Contract:** Hobbes expressed his views in a work called “Leviathan” (1651). The horrors of the English Civil War convinced him that all humans were naturally selfish and wicked. Without governments to keep order, Hobbes said, there would be “war of every man against every man” (“el hombre es un lobo para el hombre”). In this state of nature, as Hobbes called it, life would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Hobbes argued that to escape such a bleak life, people gave up their rights to a strong ruler. In exchange, they gained law and order. Hobbes called this agreement, by which people created government, the **social contract**. Because people acted in their own self-interest, Hobbes said, the ruler needed total power to keep citizens under control. The best government was one that had the awesome power of a leviathan (sea monster). In Hobbes’s view, such a government was an absolute monarchy, which could impose order and demand obedience.

This engraving depicts the beheading of Charles I. Hobbes developed his political ideas out of the violent events in England in the early 1600s.
Locke’s Natural Rights. Locke held a different, more positive, view of human nature. He believed that people could learn from experience and improve themselves. As reasonable beings, they had the natural ability to govern their own affairs and to look after the welfare of society. Locke criticized absolute monarchy and favored the idea of self-government.

According to Locke, all people are born free and equal, with three natural rights — life, liberty, and property. The purpose of government, said Locke, is to protect these rights. If a government fails to do so, citizens have a right to overthrow it. Locke published his ideas in 1690.

Locke’s theory had a deep influence on modern political thinking. His statement that a government’s power comes from the consent of the people is the foundation of modern democracy. The ideas of government by popular consent and the right to rebel against unjust rulers helped inspire struggles for liberty in Europe and the Americas.

THE PHILOSOPHES ADVOCATE REASON: The Enlightenment reached its height in France in the mid-1700s. Paris became the meeting place for people who wanted to discuss politics and ideas. The social critics of this period in France were known as philosophes. The philosophes believed that people could apply reason to all aspects of life — just as Isaac Newton had applied reason to science. Five important concepts formed the core of their philosophy:

- **Reason**: Enlightened thinkers believed truth could be discovered through reason or logical thinking. Reason, they said, was the absence of intolerance, bigotry, or prejudice in one’s thinking.
- **Nature**: the philosophes referred to nature frequently. To them, what was natural was also good and reasonable. They believed that there were natural laws of economics and politics just as there were natural laws of motion.
- **Happiness**: a person who lived by nature’s laws would find happiness, the philosophes said. They were impatient with the medieval notion that people should accept misery in this world to find joy in the hereafter. The philosophes wanted well-being on earth, and they believed it was possible.
- **Progress**: The philosophes were the first Europeans to believe in progress for society. Now that people used a scientific approach, they believed, society and humankind could be perfected.
- **Liberty**: The philosophes envied the liberties that the English people had won in their Glorious Revolution and Bill of Rights. In France, there were many restrictions on speech, religion, trade, and personal travel. Through reason, the philosophes believed, society could be set free.
Voltaire Combats Intolerance: Probably the most brilliant and influential of the philosophes was François Marie Arouet. Using the pen name Voltaire, he published more than 70 books of political essays, philosophy, history, fiction, and drama.

Voltaire often used satire against his opponents, he made frequent targets of the clergy, the aristocracy, and the government. His sharp tongue made him enemies at the French court, and twice he was sent to prison. After his second jail term, Voltaire was exiled to England for two years. There, Voltaire came to admire the English government much more than his own. After he returned to Paris, much of his work mocked the laws and customs of France. He even dared to raise doubts about the Christian religion. The French king and France’s Catholic bishops were outraged. In 1734, fearing another unpleasant jail term, Voltaire fled Paris.

Montesquieu and the Separation of Powers: Another influential French writer, the Baron de Montesquieu, devoted himself to the study of political liberty. An aristocrat and lawyer, Montesquieu studied the history of ancient Rome. He concluded that Rome’s collapse was directly related to its loss of political liberties.

Like Voltaire, Montesquieu believed that Britain was the best-governed country of his own day. Here was a government, he thought, in which power was balanced among three groups of officials. The British king and his ministers held executive power. They carried out the laws of the state. The members of Parliament held legislative, or lawmaking, power. The judges of the English courts held judicial power. They interpreted the laws to see how each applied to a specific case. Montesquieu called this division of the power among different branches separation of powers.

Montesquieu oversimplified the British system (it did not actually separate powers this way). His idea, however, became a part of his most famous book, "On the Spirit of Laws" (1748). In his book, he proposed that separation of powers would keep any individual or group from gaining total control of the government. “Power”, he wrote, “should be a check to power”. Each branch of government would serve as a check on the other two. This idea later would be called “checks and balances”.

Although he made powerful enemies, Voltaire never stopped fighting for tolerance, reason, freedom of religious belief, and freedom of speech. He used his quill pen as if it were a deadly weapon in a thinker’s war against humanity’s worst enemies – intolerance, prejudice, and superstition. Such attitudes were, he said, “l’infâme”, he often ended his letters with a fighting slogan: “Écrasez l’infâme!” (“Crush the infamous or evil thing!”)
Rousseau, Champion of Freedom: A third great philosophe, Jean Jacques Rousseau, was passionately committed to individual freedom. Rousseau worked as an engraver, music teacher, tutor and secretary. Eventually, Rousseau made his way to Paris and won recognition as a writer of essays. There he met and befriended other philosophes, although he felt out of place in the circles of Paris high society in which they traveled.

A strange, brilliant, and controversial figure, Rousseau strongly disagreed with other Enlightenment thinkers on many matters. Most philosophes believed that reason, science, and art would improve life for all people. Rousseau, however, argued that civilization corrupted people’s natural goodness. “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains”, he wrote. In the earliest times, according to Rousseau, people had lived as free and equal individuals in a primitive “state of nature”. As people became civilized, however, the strongest among them forced everyone else to obey unjust laws. Thus, freedom and equality were destroyed.

Rousseau believed that the only good government was one that was freely formed by the people and guided by the “general will” of society—a direct democracy. Under such a government, people agree to give up some of their freedom in favor of the common good. In 1762, he explained his political philosophy in a book called “The Social Contract”.

Rousseau’s view of the social contract differed greatly from that of Hobbes. For Hobbes, the social contract was a agreement between a society and its government. For Rousseau, it was an agreement among free individuals to create a society and a government.

Like Locke, Rousseau argued that legitimate government came from the consent of the governed. However, Rousseau believed in a much broader democracy than Locke had stood for. He argued that all people were equal and that titles of nobility should be abolished. Rousseau’s ideas inspired many of the leaders of the French Revolution who overthrew the monarchy in 1789.

IMPACT OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT: Over a span of a few decades, Enlightenment writers challenged long-held ideas about society. They examined such principles as the divine right of monarchs, the union of church and state, and unequal social classes. They held these beliefs up to the light of reason and found them unreasonable.

The philosophes mainly lived in the world of ideas. They formed and popularized new theories. Although they encouraged European monarchs to make reforms, they were not active revolutionaries. However, their theories eventually inspired the American, and French revolutions and other revolutionary movements in the 1800s. Enlightenment thinking produced three other long-term effects that helped shape Western civilization.

Belief in Progress. The first effect was a belief in progress. Pioneers such as Galileo and Newton had discovered the key for unlocking the mysteries of nature in the 1500s and 1600s. With the door thus opened, the growth of scientific knowledge seemed to quicken in the 1700s. Scientists made key new discoveries in chemistry, physics, biology, and mechanics. The successes of the Scientific Revolution gave people the confidence that human reason could solve social problems. Philosophes and reformers urged an end to the practice of slavery. They also argued for more social equality and improvements in education. Through reason, a better society was possible.

A More Secular Outlook. A second outcome was the rise of a more secular, or worldly, outlook. During the Enlightenment, people began to openly question their religious beliefs and the teachings of the church. Before the Scientific Revolution, people accepted the mysteries of the universe as the mysteries of God. One by one, scientists discovered that these mysteries could be explained mathematically. Newton himself was deeply religious man, and he sought to reveal God’s majesty through his work. However, his findings caused some people to change the way they thought about God.

Voltaire and other critics attacked some of the beliefs and practices of organized Christianity. They wanted to rid religious faith of superstition and fear and promote tolerance of all religions.
Importance of the Individual. Faith in science and in progress produced a third outcome—the rise of individualism. As people began to turn away from the church and royalty for guidance, they looked to themselves instead.

The philosophes encouraged people to use their own ability to reason in order to judge what is right or wrong. They also emphasized the importance of the individual in society. Government, they argued, was formed by individuals to promote their welfare. The British thinker Adam Smith extended the emphasis on the individual to economic thinking. He believed that individuals acting in their own self-interest created economic progress.

During the Enlightenment, reason took center stage. The greatest minds of Europe followed each other’s work with interest and often met to discuss their ideas. Some of the kings and queens of Europe were also very interested. They sought to apply some of the philosophes’ ideas to create progress in their countries.

ENLIGHTENED DESPOTS (Despotismo Ilustrado).

From the salons, artists’ studios, and concert halls of Europe, the Enlightenment spirit also swept through Europe’s royal courts. Many philosophes, including Voltaire, believed that the best form of government was a monarchy in which the ruler respected the people’s right. The philosophes tried to convince monarchs to rule justly. Some monarchs embraced the new ideas and made reforms that reflected the Enlightenment spirit. They became known as enlightened despots.

The enlightened despots supported the philosophes’ ideas. But they also had no intention of giving up any power. The changes they made were motivated by two desires: they wanted to make their countries stronger and their own rule more effective. We can summarize this idea in one sentence: “everything for the people, but without the people” (“Todo para el pueblo, pero sin el pueblo”). The foremost of Europe’s enlightened despots were Frederick II of Prussia, Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II of Austria, and Catherine the Great of Russia.
MODERN AGE OR OLD REGIME (Antiguo Régimen)

About 1500, change began to speed up faster than ever before. The speedup began in Western Europe. Historians say Middle Age ended about then. They call the new period of history the “Modern Age”. It is also called the “Age of Western Expansion”.

DEMOGRAPHY: In the Old Regime we can find high birthrate and high mortality (or death rate) (disease, wars, famine, poor medical knowledge....) so the natural increase of the population was really limited.

SOCIETY: The people were still divided into three large social classes, or estates. The three estates: the clergy, the nobility, and commoners (bourgeoisie and peasant), and are often referred to by medieval ranking of importance (as the hierarchy was ordained by God) as the First, Second, and Third Estates respectively.

POLITICS: The new political ideas were strengthened by religious changes. The Reformation was started by Luther and other reformers for religious reasons. However, it was supported by many persons for political reasons. The power of the popes was cut down. Strong kings arose in England, France, and Spain. These kings were helped by taxes paid by the middle class. They put down feudal nobles and set up strong armies and navies.

The new, successful state was the “nation-state”. Nation-state brought many people speaking the same language under one strong government. The government of an early nation-state was usually headed by a king or monarch. The king’s aim was to unite his people and make his state as powerful as he could. The king’s power was an absolute power, and most of the king’s people seemed to like it that way.

Absolute Monarchy: most of the kingdoms of Europe were ruled by monarchs who had great power. Most of these monarchs ruled like dictators. They claimed to have “absolute power”, that is, power that could not be limited or questioned.

In Modern Age, Kings gained this absolute power gradually, as other groups in society lost power. The nobles lost control over their knights and peasants. The church, too, could no longer give orders to the king.

Other groups in society supported the kings. Rich tradesmen and merchants wanted a strong government. They wanted law and order throughout the land. The taxes they paid helped kings to build up strong armies. Perhaps the most important help of all to kings was the feeling of nationalism. That is, many people in each country felt proud of belonging to their nation. They wanted their nation-state to be strong and powerful. They believed that their state could be strong only if it had a strong central government. Absolute monarchy seemed like the right type of government for a nation-state. Later, however, many people became unhappy with absolute monarchy.

ECONOMY: The main economy activity was the traditional agriculture, that used ancient method and tools so they got low production.

Since 1700’s the traditional crafts started to lived with the manufacture of witch products were created apart of the guilds (gremios).

The commerce inside the country was poor because of the bad quality of the road links and the several taxes existed. But the international commerce grew thanks of the Western Expansion in America.
CENTRAL EUROPEAN MONARCHS CLASH

In 1700s we can find different great nation-state in Europe, as England, France, Prussia and Austria, fighting for power. Neither of them was strong enough to head the group. In this century the most important clashes were:

**War of the Austrian Succession:** In 1740, Maria Theresa of Hapsburgs succeeded her father, just five months after Frederick II became king of Prussia. Frederick wanted the Austrian land of Silesia, which bordered Prussia. Silesia produced iron ore, textiles, and food products. Frederick assumed that because Maria Theresa was a woman, she would not be forceful enough to defend her lands. In 1740, he sent his army to occupy Silesia, beginning the War of the Austrian Succession.

Even though Maria Theresa had recently given birth, she journeyed to Hungary. There she held her infant in her arms as she asked the Hungarian nobles for aid. Even though the nobles resented their Hapsburg rulers, they pledged to give Maria Theresa an army. Great Britain also joined Austria to fight its longtime enemy France, which was Prussia’s ally. Although Maria Teresa did stop Prussia’s aggression, she lost Silesia.

**The Seven Year’s war:** Maria Theresa decided that the French kings were no longer Austria’s chief enemies. She made an alliance with them. The result was a diplomatic revolution. When Frederick heard of her actions, he signed a treaty with Britain –Austria’s former ally. Now, Austria, France, Russia, and others were allied against Britain and Prussia. Not only had Austria and Prussia switched allies, but for the first time Russia was playing a role in European affairs.

In 1756, Frederick attacked Saxony, an Austrian ally. Soon every great European power was involved in the war. Fought in Europe, India, and North America, the war lasted until 1763. It was called the Seven Years’ War. The war did not change the territorial situation in Europe but it was a different story on other continents. Both France and Britain had colonies in North America and the West Indies. Both were competing economically in India. The British emerged as the real victors in the Seven Years’ War. France lost its colonies in North America, and Britain gained sole economic domination of India.
PARLIAMENT LIMITS THE ENGLISH MONARCHY

**MAIN IDEA:** Absolute rulers in England were overthrown, and Parliament gained power.

**WHY IT MATTERS NOW:** many of the government reforms of this period contributed to the democratic tradition of several west countries.

**SETTING THE STAGE:** during her reign, Queen Elizabeth I of England had frequent conflicts with Parliament. Many of the arguments were over money, because the treasury did not have enough funds to pay the queen’s expenses. By the time Elizabeth died in 1603, she left a huge debt for her successor to deal with. Parliament’s financial power was one obstacle to English rulers’ becoming absolute monarchs.

**MONARCHS CLASH WITH PARLIAMENT** James I of England inherited the unsettled issues of Elizabeth’s reign. The key question was how much power Parliament would have in governing. James believed he had absolute authority to rule. He said in a speech, “Kings are justly called gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power upon earth”. James’ worst struggles with Parliament were over money. Parliament was reluctant to pay for James’s expensive court and foreign wars.

**Charles I Fights Parliament.** In 1625, Charles I (James I son) took the throne. Charles always needed Money – in part because he was at war with both Spain and France. Several times when Parliament refused to give him funds, he dissolved it.

By 1628, Charles was forced to call Parliament again. This time it refused to grant him any money until he signed a document that is known as the “Petition of Right”. In this petition, the king agreed to four points:

- He would not imprison subjects without due cause.
- He would not levy taxes without Parliament’s consent
- He would not house soldiers in private homes
- He would not impose martial law in peacetimes.

After agreeing to the petition, Charles ignored it. In 1629, Charles dissolved Parliament and refused to call it back into session. To get money, he imposed all kinds of fees and fines (multas) on the English people. His popularity decreased year by year.

**ENGLISH CIVIL WAR** Charles I wanted his kingdoms to follow one religion so the Scots rebelled, assembled a huge army, and threatened to invade England. To meet this danger, Charles needed money –money he could get only by calling Parliament into session-. This gave Parliament a chance to oppose him.

**War topples a king:** During the autumn of 1641, Parliament passed laws to limit royal power. Furious, Charles tried to arrest Parliament’s leaders but they escaped.

From 1642 to 1649, supporters and opponents of King Charles fought the English Civil War. Those who remained loyal to Charles were called Royalists or Cavaliers. On the other side were Puritan supporters of Parliament (Cavaliers mockingly called them Roundheads).

Oliver Cromwell was the Roundheads’ general. In 1646, Cromwell’s New Model Army defeated the Cavaliers. By the following year, the Puritans held the king prisoner.

In 1649, Cromwell and the Puritans brought Charles to trial for treason. They found him guilty and sentenced him to death. The execution of Charles was revolutionary. Never before had a reigning monarch faced a public trial and execution.

Oliver Cromwell
**Cromwell’s Rule.** Cromwell now held the reins of power. In 1649, he abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords. He established a commonwealth – a republican form of government. In 1653, Cromwell sent the remaining members of Parliament home. Cromwell’s associate John Lambert drafted a constitution, the first written constitution of any modern European state. However, Cromwell eventually tore up the document and ruled as military dictator.

**Puritan Morality.** In England, Cromwell and the Puritans sought to reform society. They made laws that promoted Puritan morality and abolished activities they found sinful, such as going to the theater. Although a strict Puritan, Cromwell favored religious toleration for all Christians except Catholics. He even welcomed back Jews, who had been expelled from England in 1290.

**RESTORATION AND REVOLUTION** Cromwell ruled until his death in 1658. Shortly afterward, the government he had established collapsed, and a new Parliament was selected. The English people were sick of military rule. In 1659, Parliament voted to ask the older son of Charles I to rule England.

**Charles II reigns.** Because he restored the monarchy, the period of his rule is called the Restoration. Charles II also restored the theater, sporting events, and dancing.

During Charles II’s reign, Parliament passed an important guarantee of freedom. In addition, Parliament debated who should inherit Charles’s throne. Because Charles had no legitimate child, his heir was his brother James, who was Catholic. A group called the Whigs opposed James, and a group called the Tories supported him. These two groups were the ancestors of England’s first political parties.

**James II and the Glorious Revolution.** In 1685, Charles II died, and James II became king. James soon offended his subjects by flauting his Catholicism. Violating English law, he appointed several Catholics to high office. When Parliament protested, James dissolved it. In 1688, James’s second wife gave birth to a son. English Protestants became terrified at the prospect of a line of Catholic kings.

James had an older daughter, Mary, who was Protestant. She was also the wife of William of Orange, a prince of the Netherlands. Seven members of Parliament invited William and Mary to overthrow James for the sake of Protestantism. When William led his army to London in 1688, James fled to France. This bloodless overthrow of King James II is called the **Glorious Revolution**.

**POLITICAL CHANGES** At their coronation, William and Mary vowed “to govern the people of this kingdom of England... according to the statutes in Parliament agreed on and the laws and customs of the same”. By doing so, William and Mary recognized Parliament as their partner in governing. England had become not an absolute monarchy but a constitutional monarchy, where laws limited the ruler’s power.

**Bill of Rights.** To make clear the limits of royal power, Parliament drafted a Bill of Rights in 1689. This document listed many things that a ruler could not do:
- No suspending of Parliament’s law
- No levying of taxes without a specific grant from Parliament
- No interfering with freedom of speech in Parliament
- NO penalty for a citizen who petitions the king about grievances.

**Cabinet System Develops.** After 1688, no British monarch could rule without consent of Parliament. At the same time, Parliament could not rule without the consent of the monarch. If the two disagreed, government came to a standstill.

During the 1700s, this potential problem was remedied by the development of a group of government ministers called the **cabinet.** These ministers acted in the ruler’s name but in reality represented the major party of Parliament. Therefore, they became the link between the monarch and the majority in Parliament. Over time, the cabinet became the center of power and policymaking. Under the cabinet system, the leader of the majority party in Parliament heads the cabinet and is called the **prime minister.** This system of English government continues today.
PEOPLE AND TERMS

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): A philosopher and political theorist whose 1651 treatise *Leviathan* effectively kicked off the English Enlightenment. The controversial *Leviathan* detailed Hobbes’s theory that all humans are inherently self-driven and evil and that the best form of government is thus a single, all-powerful monarch to keep everything in order.

John Locke (1632–1704): An English political theorist who focused on the structure of governments. Locke believed that men are all rational and capable people but must compromise some of their beliefs in the interest of forming a government for the people. In his famous *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), he championed the idea of a representative government that would best serve all constituents.

Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755): The foremost French political thinker of the Enlightenment, whose most influential book, *The Spirit of Laws*, expanded John Locke’s political study and incorporated the ideas of a division of state and separation of powers. Montesquieu’s work also ventured into sociology: he spent a considerable amount of time researching various cultures and their climates, ultimately deducing that climate is a major factor in determining the type of government a given country should have.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727): An English scholar and mathematician regarded as the father of physical science. Newton’s discoveries anchored the Scientific Revolution and set the stage for everything that followed in mathematics and physics. He shared credit for the creation of calculus, and his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* introduced the world to gravity and fundamental laws of motion.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778): An eclectic Swiss-French thinker who brought his own approach to the Enlightenment, believing that man was at his best when unshackled by the conventions of society. Rousseau’s epic *The Social Contract* (1762) conceived of a system of direct democracy in which all citizens contribute to an overarching “general will” that serves everyone at once. Later in his life, Rousseau released *Confessions* (1789), which brought a previously unheard-of degree of personal disclosure to the genre of autobiography. The frank personal revelations and emotional discussions were a major cause for the shift toward Romanticism.

Voltaire (1694–1778): A French writer and the primary satirist of the Enlightenment, who criticized religion and leading philosophies of the time. Voltaire’s numerous plays and essays frequently advocated freedom from the ploys of religion, while *Candide* (1759), the most notable of his works, conveyed his criticisms of optimism and superstition into a neat package.

Deism (Deismo): A system of faith to which many of the French philosophes and other Enlightenment thinkers subscribed. Deists believed in an all-powerful God but viewed him as a “cosmic watchmaker” who created the universe and set it in autonomous motion and then never again tampered with it. Deists also shunned organized religion, especially Church doctrines about eternal damnation and a “natural” hierarchy of existence.

Enlightened Absolutism: A trend in European governments during the later part of the Enlightenment, in which a number of absolute monarchs adopted Enlightenment-inspired reforms yet retained a firm grip on power. Frederick the Great of Prussia, Maria-Theresa and Joseph II of Austria, Charles III of Spain, and Catherine the Great of Russia are often counted among these “enlightened despots.”

Glorious Revolution: The name given to the bloodless coup d’état in England in 1688, which saw the Catholic monarch, King James II, removed from the throne and replaced by the Protestants William and Mary. The new monarchs not only changed the religious course of England and the idea of divine right but also allowed the additional personal liberties necessary for the Enlightenment to truly flourish.

Individualism: One of the cornerstones of the Enlightenment, a philosophy stressing the recognition of every person as a valuable individual with inalienable, inborn rights.

Mercantilism: The economic belief that a favorable balance of trade—that is, more exports than imports—would yield more gold and silver, and thus overall wealth and power, for a country. Governments tended to monitor and meddle with their mercantilist systems closely, which Scottish economist Adam Smith denounced as bad economic practice in his *Wealth of Nations*.
Philosophes: The general term for those academics and intellectuals who became the leading voices of the French Enlightenment during the eighteenth century. Notable philosophes included Voltaire, the Baron de Montesquieu, and Denis Diderot.

Rationalism: Arguably the foundation of the Enlightenment, the belief that, by using the power of reason, humans could arrive at truth and improve human life.

Relativism: Another fundamental philosophy of the Enlightenment, which declared that different ideas, cultures, and beliefs had equal merit. Relativism developed in reaction to the age of exploration, which increased European exposure to a variety of peoples and cultures across the world.

Romanticism: A movement that surfaced near the end of the Enlightenment that placed emphasis on innate emotions and instincts rather than reason, as well as on the virtues of existing in a natural state. Writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe both contributed greatly to the development of Romanticism.

Salons: Gathering places for wealthy, intellectually minded elites during the years during and prior to the Enlightenment. The salons typically held weekly meetings where upper-class citizens gathered to discuss the political and social theories of the day.

Scientific Revolution: A gradual development of thought and approaches to the study of the universe that took place from approximately 1500 to 1700 and paved the way for the Enlightenment. Coming from humble beginnings with basic observations, the Scientific Revolution grew to a fever pitch when scientists such as Galileo Galilei, René Descartes, and Johannes Kepler entered the scene and essentially rewrote history, disproving Church doctrines, explaining religious “miracles,” and setting the world straight on all sorts of scientific principles. The result was not only new human knowledge but also a new perspective on the acquisition of knowledge, such as the scientific method.

Separation of Power: A political idea, developed by John Locke and the Baron de Montesquieu, that power in government should be divided into separate branches—typically legislative, judicial, and executive—in order to ensure that no one branch of a governing body can gain too much authority.

Social Contract: An idea in political philosophy, generally associated with John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, stating that a government and its subjects enter into an implicit contract when that government takes power. In exchange for ceding some freedoms to the government and its established laws, the subjects expect and demand mutual protection. The government’s authority, meanwhile, lies only in the consent of the governed.

Thirty Years’ War: A brutal, destructive conflict in Germany between 1618 and 1648. The Thirty Years’ War began when Bohemian Protestants revolted out of a refusal to be ruled by a Catholic king. The battle would eventually spread throughout Germany and involve many other countries on both sides. Enlightenment thinkers reacted against the war with treatises about education, international relations, and the nature of war itself.