

# An analysis of frederick the great

Business



Frederick the Great: “ Enlightened Monarch”, Warrior Despot, Rebellious Prince, and Patron of the Arts- the Eighteenth Century might just have produced the most enigmatic leader the world has known. Simply put, Frederick the Great was a man of “ opposing forces”; the living embodiment of the Hegelian philosophy.

For it was his opposing personality traits that determined his actions and altered German history forever. Without Frederick conquering lands around him and ensuring the survival of Prussia as a whole, it would've been much harder for Otto Von Bismarck to unite it all into one nation. Upon learning about Frederick I believe his personality was composed of four main components. He was the “ Enlightened Monarch”, a king who cherished and utilized many of the ideals of the Enlightenment. However, in contrast to his Enlightenment ideals within his own country of Prussia, he was also the Warrior Despot to the nations he went to war with.

Stressing the efficiency of his military much like later figures such as Czar Nicholas the 1st and utilizing the Autocracy of his Monarchical position to make decisions he felt would benefit the country was a vital characteristic of Frederick's rule. Many of his actions can be seen as a way of rebelling against his tyrannical father. Frederick devoted much of his life to patronage of art within Prussia. In many ways the extremities of these personalities balanced out Frederick and allowed him to protect, improve, and help establish a sturdier base for what would later be a true world power. One can draw parallels between Napoleon and Frederick, because they both were the best examples of Autocratic rulers stressing the ideals of the Enlightenment.

In a time like the 1700's, for a country to have only 14 people sentenced to death in one year is amazing.

Even the great nations like France and England were serving up unjust death sentences at an expedient rate. In this time period, what other Monarch so radically used Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments* as a guideline for his country's legal system? Frederick was once quoted as saying " If you smash a statue I sentence you to put it back together again" (MacDonough, 340). This outlook was light years ahead of his time, and stressed the modern theme of the penal system being a means to rehabilitate not to punish and set an example through fear. Torture was outlawed in Prussia except for people accused of treason, which concurs with his Warrior Despot persona. At one point Frederick even labeled himself as a deist, the quintessential Enlightenment religious ideal.

Even through his strict religious upbringing and the heavy Protestant ideals around him Frederick still stressed tolerance within his borders. He once wrote to the Duke Charles Eugene of Wurrtemberg saying " Tolerance will make the people adore you; persecution will make them abominate you." (MacDonough, 197). This tolerance is also reflected in his more lax laws compared to the rest of Europe. Frederick was smart however, and saw that making too many changes could result in a nobleman uprising much like what happened to the Etruscans.

So even though he wished to outlaw serfdom and erase their debts he felt it would hurt the noblemen too much; their lands had just been trampled over by the invading Austrian and Russian armies along with the powder blue

Prussian military. Frederick was so into the enlightenment and what it stood for that he had an almost lifelong correspondence with one of the age's most notable figureheads, the exalted Voltaire. Voltaire, one of the biggest critics of the European regimes, wrote back and forth with Frederick as a friend! Even through the occasions of insincerity by Voltaire and his manipulative actions we still see that Voltaire had a genuine respect for him, as evidenced by Voltaire's eulogy-like quote after Frederick's death: "A man who gives battle as readily as he writes an opera; who takes advantage of all the hours that other kings waste following a dog chasing after a stag; he has written more books than any of his contemporary princes has sired bastards; and he has won more victories than he has written books" (MacDonough, 386).

Enlightened as Frederick was, he often displayed noteworthy feats of rationalism, such as suing for peace with Russia after Empress Anna Petrovna, queen and leader, died. He didn't allow any personal feelings of pride obstruct the most reasonable and safe choice.

The Enlightened Monarch persona of Frederick was key in maintaining stability within his kingdom and keeping all the classes satisfied. While the "Enlightened Monarch" facet kept the country running smoothly and fairly from within, it was the aggressive Warrior Despot that ensured the survival of Prussia as a whole. Much like his father, Frederick stressed the importance of the military. He saw, and (due to his charismatic nature) the whole country saw being a Prussian soldier as a great honor. Frederick often drafted high numbers of troops to serve but there was never any backlash to him. This is due to Frederick giving genuine respect to his men, instead of treating them like disposable grunts.

While on the battlefield Frederick embodied almost a war-god standing amongst his men, heralding the doom upon the opposing forces. This just added to immense respect the Prussian people had for him; a king standing among his men acting as a general; “ The king was constantly in the thickest fire” (MacDonough, 266). This great amount of courage is likely due to a traumatic event in his earlier years when he ran away from a battle. The embarrassment he felt must have caused him to vow never to display cowardice on the battlefield again. Frederick was steadfast in his will during the Seven Years War, “ Prussia could only put, with the greatest efforts, but a hundred-fifty thousand men on the field...the struggle was successfully carried on, for seven years was [because of] the military genius of the king [and] his indomitable perseverance” (Henty, 4). Along with the valiance he displayed on the warfront he also demonstrated a thorough understanding of military tactics behind the scenes.

Much of what made Frederick and his generals successful was that instead of using tactical theories, he based his tactics on his prior battles, focusing on the mistakes made and the things that worked. Frederick was once quoted as saying “ Our reason only works upon matters upon which our experience throws light” (Luavas, 18). Even with the great casualties brought on by the Seven Years War, it can still be considered one of the greatest victories of all history. Prussia managed to not only survive but gain more influence on a world scale, even surrounded by hostile countries, all with militaries more powerful than their own. If not for Frederick’s military might and tactical mind, Prussian history would end there and likely the country, just an arm of one of the many hostile foreign aggressors.

Due to his father's tyrannical nature, Frederick did much to rebel. Regular beatings and emotionally scarring events such as the forced viewing of the decapitation of his best friend caused Frederick to renounce and rebel against much of his father's legacy. Frederick William, Frederick the Great's father, was a very frugal ruler. Frederick William had witnessed his own father lavishly spend capital on the most frivolous of purchases until the country was in debt and decided to do the opposite and save, so the country would never have to borrow. Much like his grandfather though, Frederick was a notorious spender, whether it was in his personal life, " Borrowing fully 17, 000 thalers...when he only needed 9, 000" ( MacDonough, 68), or for the state. However, his lack of hesitation to spend money assured that Prussia would be modern.

While still fewer in the amount of soldiers, the Prussian military now matched the quality of even the strongest nations; " Having made his army superior in quality, he never stayed to count his numbers but attack boldly and skillfully" (Brackenbury, 265) His government expenditures brought monetary returns as well as added protection. The Prussian army was able to win the Silesian Wars and capture Silesia because of their military might, thereby connecting the wealth of raw materials within Silesia to Prussia's production industry. Industry growth led to an increase in economic development within the country; thus allowing it to become more influential to the rest of Europe. It doesn't matter how powerful your military is, if the people within your country are starving; a nation without prosperity in its borders is set to fail and by his acquisition of Silesia he ensured that Prussia

was economically sound as well as militarily sound. Frederick had a great passion for the arts.

He was an advocate of the rococo artistic design in architecture and a modern day patron of the arts in the vein of the Renaissance Italian nobles. The best example of Frederick's patronage is perhaps Francesco Algarotti. The "Swan of Mantua", as he was called by Voltaire, was a friend to the king as well as an advisor. While he was paid the large salary of an advisor his advice wasn't taken very seriously and he was primarily just "singing for his supper with oily flattery" (MacDonough, 192). Algarotti did not literally sing; he was paid mainly to converse with Frederick over the arts and philosophy. Along with being an advocate for the arts Frederick was an accomplished flutist with over one-hundred compositions to his credit. Carl Phillip Emmanuel Bach, son of the renowned Johann Sebastian Bach, was his own personal court musician. Even as a prince, Frederick was so intent on having a talented group of musicians that he "pay[ed] their salaries by borrowing from foreign governments..." (Gaines, 6). While it may seem that Frederick was only a champion of the arts for his own pleasure and because of his passion, his newfound stress on the importance of art was not without its positive effects. This revival of the arts in Prussia helped to instill a greater sense of nationalism.

New freedom given to artists allowed them to express themselves and compose works that the Prussian people could take pride in. Now, no longer were the Prussians seen by Europe as an extension of their barbarian Germanic ancestors, they were now on equal ground with the rest of Europe from a cultural standpoint. The four main facets of Frederick's personality

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helped protect and expand Prussia's borders, ingrain a more powerful national identity within his people, improve the nation's economic prowess, and survive the onslaught of hostile neighbors during the Seven Years War. Through his actions Frederick helped lay the foundation for the later German empire, which with diamond-like resilience, remains today. Frederick was a great man that accomplished great things, but like all humans he was a complex man and not without many flaws. He often performed misanthropic deeds to those close to him just for the sake of it, and much of the evidence of his life suggests that he was also depressed.

However through his many faults and flaws Frederick still deserves his "The Great" surname epithet, for he was able to take a small incidental country and bring it to the forefront of World politics. Works Cited Brackenbury, C. B. Frederick the Great. New York: Putnam, 1884. Print.

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