

# The political, economic and social aspects of the enlightenment

[History](#)



## The Political, Economic and Social Aspects the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment, also known as Age of Reason, was a cultural movement that spread through England, France, Germany, and other parts of Europe. The Enlightenment mainly focused on mathematics, science, art, philosophy, politics and literature in the 1700s. This movement took away the fear of the world and the medieval views that were placed upon the people for so many years, and it also opened their eyes to new ideas and reason.

Old beliefs such as French monarchy (the privileges that were given to the French nobility) political power, and the authority of the Catholic Church were torn down. They were replaced by political and social orders that followed along the ideas of freedom and equality that came from this period. The Enlightenment's main purpose was to reform society using reason instead of tradition. The Enlightenment started after the scientific revolution in the 1500s and was effected by many events that shaped it into what we now look back to.

There were many aspects of the enlightenment that can be broken down into three key factors that contributed to this movement: Political, Economical and Social. Political covers the transition from a monarchy to a political order, as well as the three political revolutions. Economical covers the export and import of trade in Europe, and social deals with the art, theater, music and cultural parts of the movement. The Enlightenment is best identified by its political accomplishments and outcomes. This movement was marked by three political revolutions, which all helped lay the foundation for modern republican and constitutional democracy.

The first revolution was the English Revolution which took place in 1688. The English Revolution was defined by two different revolutions, the Glorious Revolution in 1688 which was the overthrow of King James II of England by the English Parliamentarians and the Dutch Stadtholder William III of Orange-Nassau. After King James II was overthrown, his Protestant daughter, Mary, and her husband William became joint-monarchs of England. The Glorious Revolution established the supremacy of Parliament over the crown. This also established the first constitutional monarchy, and made it so the power was shared between the monarchs and the nobles.

It also took part because of the growing fear of Catholic tyranny, and because at the time, England was under the control of an all powerful Catholic monarch. Marxist historians have also used the term “ English Revolution” to describe the period of the English civil wars and commonwealth (1640-1660). The English civil wars were a series of armed conflicts and political plotting between Parliamentarians and Royalists. The commonwealth was the republic that ruled England, Ireland and Scotland. The second revolution that happened during the Enlightenment was the American revolution which took place from 1775 to 1783.

This revolution was the political upheaval during the last half of the 18th century towards the end of the enlightenment in which the thirteen colonies that were formed in North America, and joined together to break away from the British Empire and form the United States of America, rejecting the authority of the Parliament of Great Britain. The last political revolution of the Enlightenment was the French Revolution which happened from 1789 to

1799. This revolution was fought to balance the inequalities in French society.

Louis XVI was a weak leader and the monarchs were in debt although only commoners paid taxes. The England government was about to go bankrupt so the king tried to raise taxes, leading to the formation of the National Assembly and the imprisonment of the royal family after France went to war against other European countries. Not until the mid 1800s did a democracy form in France after a monarchy and dictatorship. The second aspect of the enlightenment was the economic section and how it affected the enlightenment. Peasants under feudalism were kept bound to disadvantageous occupations.

The occupations that peasants were assigned was under the control of tradition and class assignment. The most disadvantaged occupation was mercantilism, which was a very closely monitored economic system that allowed the government to monitor their kingdoms import-to-export ratio. They could step if needed and maintain a favorable balance of trade for their kingdom. French economist Francois Quesnay explained in his book *Tableau Economique*, written in 1758, that a natural order of trade with only limited government intervention would be more beneficial to the individual and the society.

This idea was expanded by Scottish economist Adam Smith in his landmark *Wealth of Nations* written in 1776. This established the nature of economics into three laws, people work more productively with self interest involved, competition leads to balance and that true supply and demand are a product of free trade. The third and final aspect of the enlightenment was social and <https://assignbuster.com/the-political-economic-and-social-aspects-of-the-enlightenment/>

cultural interpretation. In opposition to the intellectual historiographical approach to the Enlightenment this aspect examines the changes that occurred during the Enlightenment in European society and cultures.

One of the primary elements of the social aspect of the enlightenment was the development of the public sphere, a social group in town where individuals could come together to discuss and identify societal problems, and then discuss political actions. This was a place where people could come together and discuss about matters of mutual interest and try to reach a common judgement. The Enlightenment also cultivated the arts, including music, art, and literature. Learning about art and music became more widespread and common during the enlightenment especially in the middle class and the general public.

Learning to read became more common and people were able to afford books because of the recent invention of the printing press. Philosophy can be traced back to 600 BC but 17th century philosophy in the Western world is normally regarded as being the start of modern philosophy, this was also known as the Age of Reason. This was also generally regarded as a departure from scholasticism and the medieval approach. The 17th-century philosophy started with the work of Rene Descartes, who set the methodology for many philosophers from the Age of Reason.

Philosophers in this era mostly focused on systems of epistemology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, politics and physical sciences. The Enlightenment helped develop and innovate philosophy, literature, mathematics and science in countries throughout Europe. It encompassed new thoughts and developments in a variety of other academic, artistic and social fields like <https://assignbuster.com/the-political-economic-and-social-aspects-of-the-enlightenment/>

economics, law, industrialtechnology, humanitarianism and fine arts. It also changed the way that people saw the world and their government. The enlightenment helped the separation of powers through out Europe and developed natural rights and a democracy in place of monarchy in France.