

# THE ENLIGHTENMENT

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*“Siecle de Lumiere” / “The Century of Light”*

# I. WHAT WAS IT?

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- ✘ Progressive, Rationalistic, Humanistic worldview
- ✘ Emerged out of the Scientific Revolution and culminated in the French Revolution
- ✘ Spokesmen = Rising Middle Class
- ✘ Paris = Center of Enlightenment
- ✘ Optimism about mankind's abilities

## II. KEY IDEAS

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- ✘ Distrust of Tradition and Revealed Religion
- ✘ Scientific method could be applied to society as well
- ✘ Society can get better as risks are taken
- ✘ Man is naturally good
- ✘ Good life is on earth

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## **III. AN ATTACK ON THE OLD REGIME**

# A. THE WORLD OF THE OLD REGIME

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- ✘ Built on tradition
- ✘ World of hierarchy, privilege and inequality
- ✘ Allied with the Church
- ✘ Challenged by the reform impulse of supporters of the Enlightenment

# B. CONFLICT WITH THE CAPITALISTIC MIDDLE CLASS

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- ✘ Support for the Middle Class social order against the traditional social order
- ✘ Size and increasing power of the Middle Class
- ✘ New notion of wealth
- ✘ Tension and discord created by the Middle Class

# C. POPULARIZATION OF SCIENCE

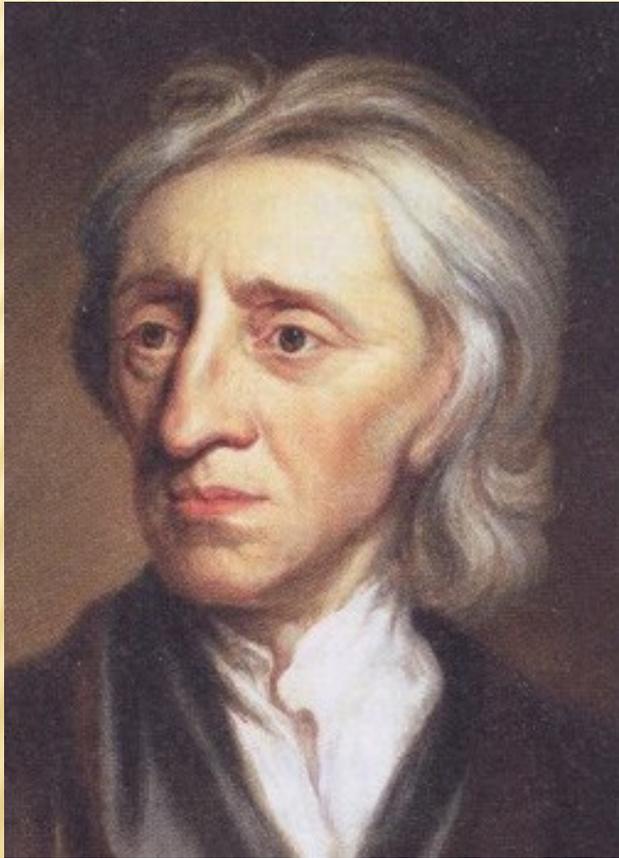
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- ✘ The popularity of science in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries
- ✘ The Scientific Revolution promised the comprehensibility of the workings of the universe

# D. A NEW WORLD OF UNCERTAINTIES

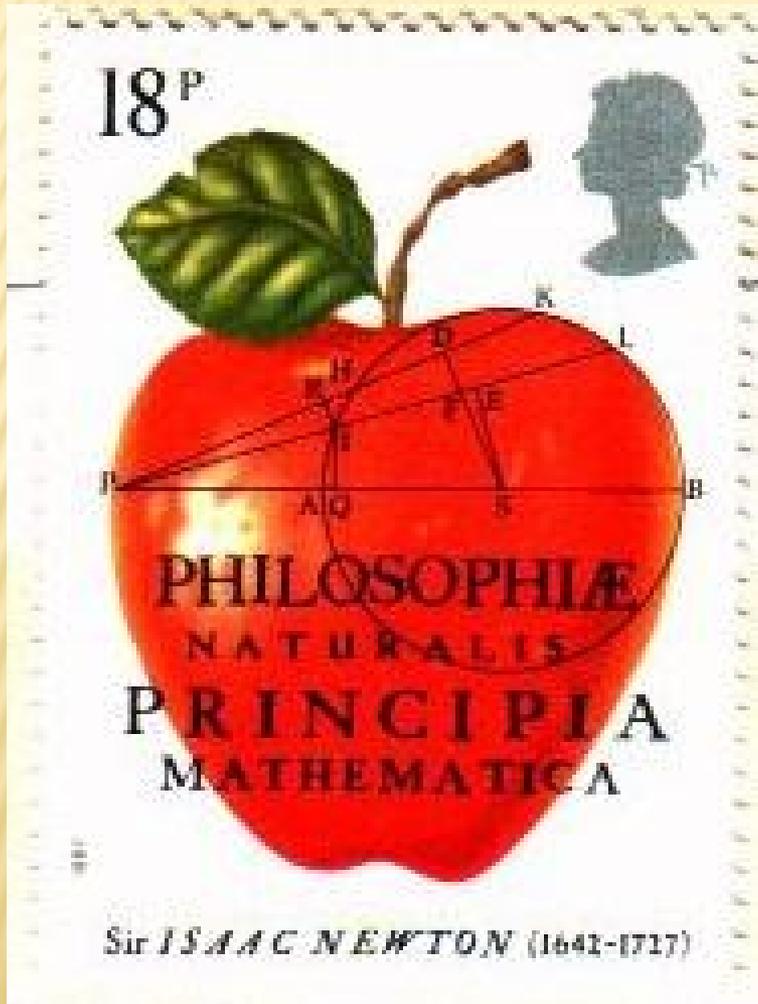
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- ✘ The Idea of Progress
- ✘ The anti-religious implications of the Enlightenment
- ✘ The relativity of truth and morality
- ✘ John Locke's New Psychology
  - Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)
  - "Tabula Rasa"

# IV. THE PHILOSOPHES

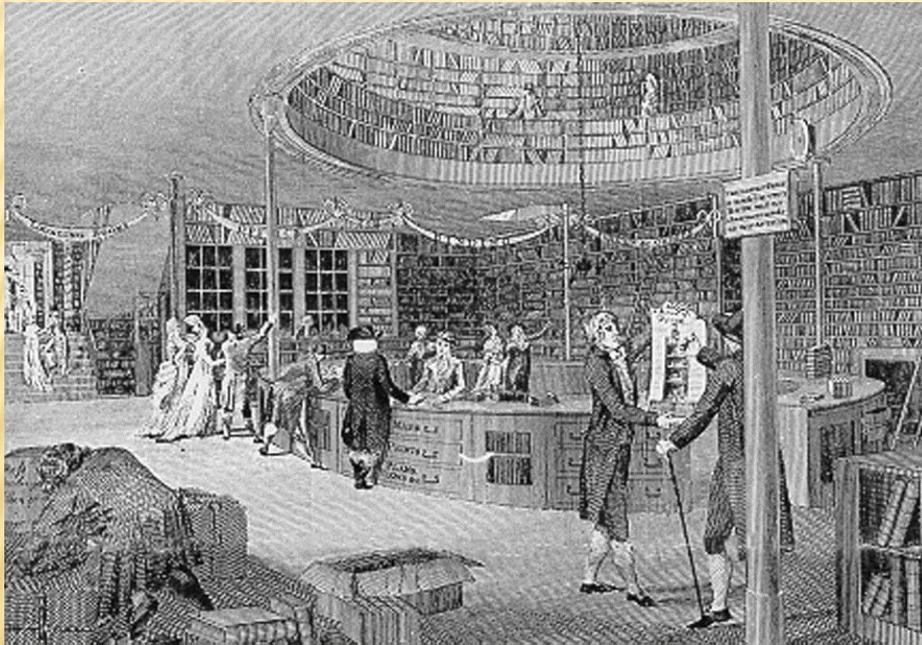
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- ✘ 18<sup>th</sup> century French intellectuals
- ✘ Interest in addressing a broad audience
- ✘ Committed to reform
- ✘ Celebrated the scientific revolution
- ✘ The “Mystique of Newton”
- ✘ Science applied to society

# V. THE PROBLEM OF CENSORSHIP

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- ✘ The attempt of the Old Regime to control new thinking
- ✘ Publishers and writers hounded by censors
- ✘ Over 1000 booksellers and authors imprisoned in the Bastille in the early 1700's
- ✘ Battling censorship

# VI. THE ROLE OF THE SALON

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- ✘ Protection and encouragement offered by French aristocratic women in their private drawing rooms
- ✘ Feminine influence on the Enlightenment
- ✘ Madame Geoffrin

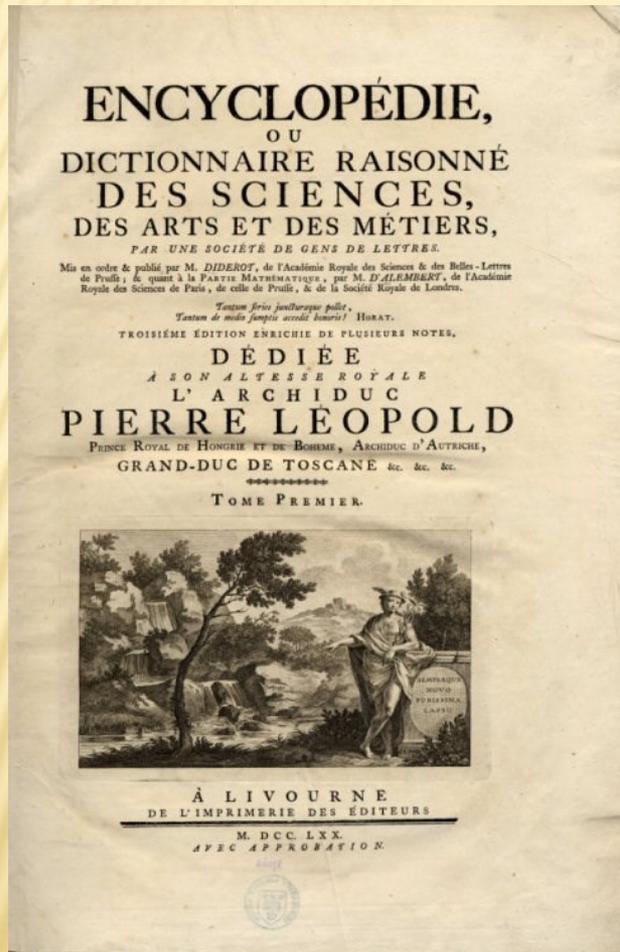
# VII. DIDEROT'S *ENCYCLOPEDIA*

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- ✘ Ultimate strength of the philosophes lay in their numbers, dedication and organization
- ✘ Written between 1751-1772
- ✘ Attempted to illustrate all human knowledge
- ✘ Problems with publication
- ✘ Emphasis on practical science

# VII. DIDEROT'S *ENCYCLOPEDIA* (CONT)



- ✘ Desire to change the “*general way of thinking*”
- ✘ Greater knowledge leads to human progress
- ✘ Emphasized moderation and tolerance
- ✘ Human nature can be molded
- ✘ Inalienable rights and the social contract
- ✘ Knowledge improves goodness

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# **VIII. FAMOUS ENLIGHTENED AUTHORS AND THINKERS BEFORE THE FRENCH REVOLUTION**

# A. BARON DE MONTESQUIEU (1689-1755)

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- ✘ *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748)
- ✘ Despotism could be avoided if political power were divided and shared by a diversity of classes
- ✘ Power must check power
- ✘ Admires British government
- ✘ French parlements must be defenders of liberty
- ✘ Influence in the US

## B. VOLTAIRE (1694-1778)

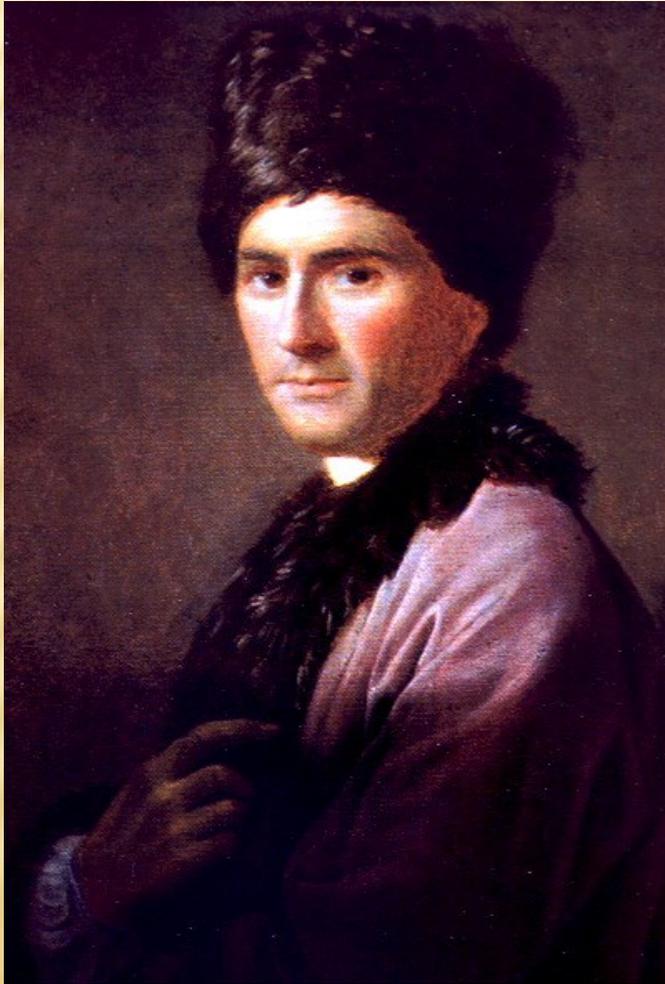
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- ✘ Enthusiasm for English institutions
- ✘ Reformer not a revolutionary
- ✘ Admirer of Louis XIV
- ✘ Relationship with Frederick the Great
- ✘ Wrote a book about Carolus Rex...

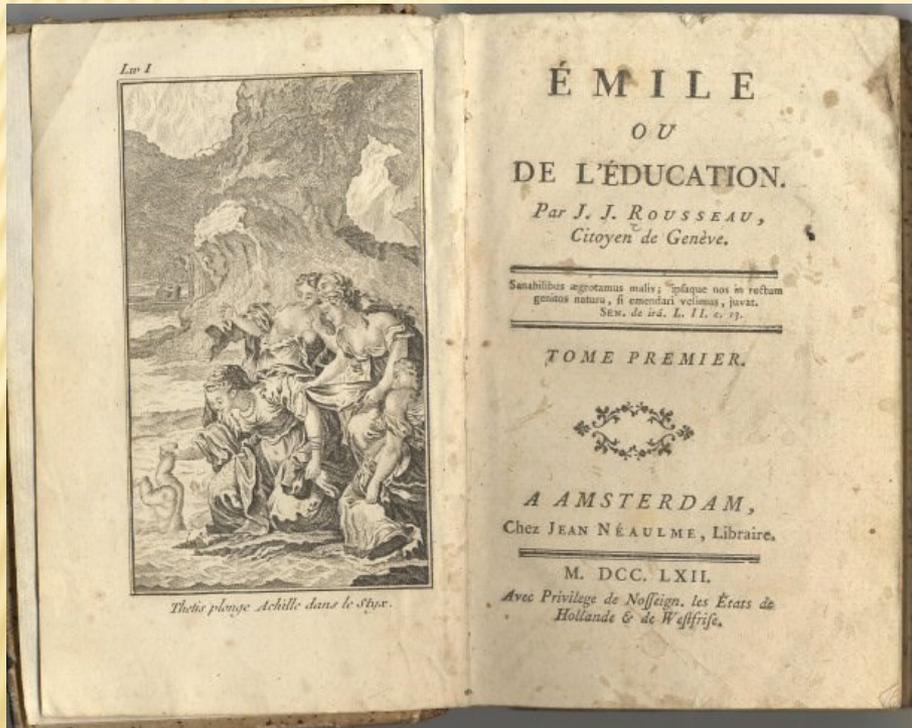
# E. JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712-1778)

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- ✘ Turns his withering critique of the Old Regime increasingly on the Enlightenment itself
- ✘ Rather than liberation, rationalism and civilization destroys the individual
- ✘ Man by nature was solitary, good and free
- ✘ His life – filled with contradictions...

# E. ROUSSEAU (CONT)



- ✗ Civilization represents decay, not progress
- ✗ **Emile** — protect children from too many books
- ✗ **The Social Contract** (1762) and the “*General Will*”
- ✗ Civilized man is an alienated man
- ✗ Transitional intellectual figure

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# **IX. FAMOUS ENLIGHTENED WOMEN DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION**

# F. OLYMPE DE GOUGES (1748-1793)

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- ✘ French playwright and political activist whose feminist and abolitionist writings reached a large audience
- ✘ In her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791), she challenged the practice of male authority and the notion of male–female inequality
- ✘ She was executed by guillotine during the Reign of Terror

# G. MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1759-1797)

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- ✘ English writer, philosopher, and advocate of women's rights (liberal feminist)
- ✘ Wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she argues that women are not naturally inferior to men, but appear to be only because they lack education
- ✘ Part of the general intellectual discussion in England and France before, during, and after the French Revolution...