

TOPIC: The Age of Enlightenment (1600's – 1700's)

General background information and fundamentals:

- Begins in England but becomes fully developed in France
 - **Why France?** = most restrictive society for philosophes to rally against
 - Absolutism – epitomizes the “Age of Kings”
 - Power of the Church
 - Social traditions of the “ancient regime”
 - French = international language – writings widely know
- Most important frontrunners
 - **John Locke** – natural law, reason, observation and experimentation, education
 - **“Essay Concerning Human Understanding”** – 1690 – puts forth idea of the blank slate – “tabula rasa” – rejection of Descartes who thought people were born with basic ideas and ways of thinking
 - **Issac Newton** – unifies ideas of natural universal lws

- Enlightenment is an **“intellectual movement”**
- **Salon Culture**
 - Hugely important **social gatherings** held in the homes of the wealthy and influential – united the elite members of the intellectual, economic, and social classes
 - Usually hosted by talented, progressive, and rich women – ex. **Madame Geoffrin** of Paris who held regular salons and was a patron of the development of Diderot’s *Encyclopedia*
 - Brought together scientists, writers, philosophes, etc. to exchange ideas, debate, think critically, and influence each other
 - Helps develop the artistic style of **“Rococo”** – identified as a more feminine style known for pastels, ornateness, and sentimentality – popular in the 18th century
 - Does this lead to empathy for women by many philosophes? – Did the position of women in particular indicate a society’s level of civilization?
- Enlightenment **not really applicable or appealing to the lower classes/peasants** – they are too tied to traditional ways and the Church – poverty condemns the common people to lives of confusion and superstition – they cannot look beyond their daily struggles – “the blind and noisy multitude”
- Enlightenment thinking itself is revolutionary, but the philosophes themselves are not

- **Central Concepts of Enlightenment Thinking:**
 - **REASON**
 - **Application of the methods of natural science** to societal institutions and examine all aspects of life
 - Doubt – Skepticism
 - Accept nothing on faith
 - Doubt any “absolute” truth especially
 - Pierre Bayle – “nothing can ever be known beyond all doubt”
 - **Progress** – humans can create better societies = Education is key!
 - **Toleration** – religion and speech
 - Voltaire – “I may not agree with what you say, but will defend to the death your right to say it.”