



## 4.2 THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN AMERICA

<b>THE AGE OF REASON</b>	The ENLIGHTENMENT was an 18 <sup>th</sup> century European philosophical movement characterized by a QUESTIONING of traditional doctrines and values, a tendency toward INDIVIDUALISM, and an emphasis on the idea of universal HUMAN PROGRESS, the empirical method of SCIENCE, and free use of REASON.
<b>The Scientific Revolution</b>	The 17 <sup>th</sup> century SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION, culminating in Isaac Newton’s discovery of the law gravity, had resulted in a MECHANICAL VIEW OF THE UNIVERSE. Men conceived of the universe as a perpetual motion machine operating according to FIXED LAWS. By using the SCIENTIFIC METHOD (hypothesis, observation, experimentation, generalization) men could discover these fixed laws and acquire a true knowledge of physical reality. Enlightenment <i>philosophes</i> accepted this mechanical view of the universe and were confident that they could open up the mysteries of the universe by using their REASON.
<b>DEISM</b>	<p>Acceptance of the mechanical view of the universe led many Enlightenment thinkers to accept the Deist concept of God. DEISM was a system of thought advocating NATURAL RELIGION BASED ON HUMAN REASON rather than revelation, emphasizing morality, and denying the interference of the Creator with the laws of the universe. Deists conceived of GOD AS A WATCHMAKER. He created the universe, set it in motion, and then stood back and let it operate according to fixed laws without interference. He created men with reason so that they would be able to discover the mysteries of the universe, gave them complete freedom of action, and then stood back and let them function without interference.</p> <p>Like every TOTAL SYSTEM, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment structure had to meet certain basic intellectual needs: (1) a plausible ACCOUNT OF THE PAST of mankind to replace Genesis, (2) a theory and a tactic of SOCIAL REFORM to replace the functions of a Church, and a VISION OF THE FUTURE of mankind on earth, instead of in Heaven.</p>
<b>DIDEROT: Account of the Past</b>	<p>Diderot’s <b>The Innocent and the Corrupt</b> illustrates how the 18<sup>th</sup> century <i>philosophes</i> provided a plausible ACCOUNT OF THE PAST of mankind to replace the Genesis account in which man is corrupt by nature because of original sin. In this account of the encounter of “civilized” men with primitive Tahitians, Diderot allows a Tahitian chieftain to speak of the natural innocence of his people.</p> <p>In their natural state, uncorrupted by the greed and vice of civilization, the Tahitians make no distinction between “yours” and “mine.” They hold their daughters and wives in common, follow their natural instincts, desire only those things that will satisfy their basic needs of food, shelter, and enjoyment.</p>
<b>ROUSSEAU: Social Contract</b>	<p>He reprimands the leader of the “civilized” men for creating dissention among his people by making them desire superfluous goods and knowledge, the comforts and vanities of life which are meaningless to man in his natural state. Thus Diderot creates an image of MANKIND IN A NATURAL STATE as good and corrupted only by society.</p> <p>Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s <b>The Religion of Feeling</b> illustrates how the <i>philosophes</i> outlined a theory for SOCIAL REFORM. In the course of educating Emile, the vicar of Savoy explains how a knowledge of God and the soul comes from the heart rather than from philosophical principles and arguments.</p> <p>He explains that we have no real knowledge about Heaven and Hell and that it is vain to contemplate such things. Instead, he proposes that one’s own remembrances of how he had acted will constitute the happiness of the just and the torments of the wicked. Rather than</p>

<p><b>CONDORCET: Vision of the Future</b></p>	<p>listening to the authority of theology or philosophy as a guide to action, he suggests that a <b>MAN SHOULD FOLLOW HIS CONSCIENCE</b> because this represents the dictates of his heart and is the surest way to achieve peace of mind.</p> <p>Finally Condorcet’s <b>Future Progress of Mankind</b> illustrates a <b>VISION OF THE FUTURE OF MANKIND ON EARTH</b>, instead of in Heaven. In this selection, he proposed a future in which the <b>INEQUALITY BETWEEN NATIONS WILL BE ELIMINATED</b>, there will be progress in equality within each nation, and man will himself be improved. This will be achieved, he believes, because of the progress of the sciences which will improve education. As men become better educated, inequality will disappear, they will understand the truth, and error will eventually become impossible. They will also develop a universal language which will enable them to communicate their knowledge more precisely and will contribute to the <b>IMPROVEMENT OF HUMANITY</b>.</p>
<p><b>ENLIGHTENMENT: Legitimized American Practices</b></p> <p><b>Social</b></p> <p><b>Political</b></p>	<p>The ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in <b>The Social Contract</b> legitimized American <b>SOCIAL PRACTICES</b>. The Americans had amore democratic social system than that which existed in Europe. (Men were not born into fixed social classes and had the opportunity of upward social mobility.) Rousseau proposed that men in their natural state were free and equal and that “no man has a right to be lord and master over others.”</p> <p>John Locke’s <b>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</b> legitimized American <b>POLITICAL PRACTICES</b>. The Americans had set up a system of representative governments to safeguard their rights as Englishmen. Locke explained that government was the result of a contract between the ruler and the ruled. (No man should by virtue of divine right or inheritance have the right to become a rule. Only if he contracted with his subjects did he have this right.) Government exists, he said, to protect the inalienable rights of the individual: life, liberty, and property. If the rule infringes on the rights of his subjects, they have the right to overthrow him.</p>
<p><b>Economic</b></p>	<p>Adam Smith’s <b>Wealth of Nations</b> legitimized American <b>ECONOMIC PRACTICES</b>. The Americans tried to bypass England’s mercantilist policies by smuggling and refusing to pay customs taxes. Smith advocated a policy of <b>laissez-faire</b> economics in which the government made no attempt to regulate the economy but, instead, allowed an invisible hand to guide it to the advantage of everyone.</p>
<p><b>Religious</b></p>	<p>Lessing’s story of <b>Nathan the Wise</b> legitimized American <b>RELIGIOUS PRACTICES</b>. The Americans practiced a variety of religions (Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish) and although they did not approve of religious sects other than their won, they were forced to tolerate one another if they were going to live together in peace. In his story, Lessing tells of a wise and virtuous king who owned a magic ring which gave him the power to be a wise and just ruler.</p> <p>Since the king had three sons and knew he was about to die, he ordered two additional rings made so that each of his sons would have one when he died. When the king finally died and the sons received their rings they began to argue about who had the “one, true” ring. Finally, they consulted Nathan the Wise in order to bring an end to the controversy. Nathan said” “no one of you has the one, true ring. Your father was a wise man and wanted each of you to be happy. Therefore, he saw to it that each of you received a ring. Although the rings are somewhat different they have the power to make each of you a wise and just ruler. Sos top arguing and live your lives so that your father would be proud of you.</p>
<p><b>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</b></p>	<p><b>Colonial life was characterized by a discrepancy between the ideal and the real. The European ideal involved fixed social classes, well-established governments, manorialism, and an established church. The colonial reality was less social stratification, more democratic governments, a diversified economy, and religious diversity. Explain how the Enlightenment legitimized American practices.</b></p>