

My name

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Modern World

Enlightenment Philosophers

I do think that enlightenment philosophers heavily influenced people these days in government, rights of men and science.

Enlightenment was a movement that was first advocated in the 17th century. Spread in the 18th century, Enlightenment was a movement to enlighten human ignorance and dream by eliminating irrationality and rationally improving the world by using reason as the basis for truth judgment. It has also had a number of effects in that era and till now. To be more specific, Enlightenment is a theory completed by scholars such as Locke who describes human beings as naturally equal, free, and capable of existence, and Hobbes who viewed human beings as selfish. They believed in the infinite development of human reason.

They also emphasized rationality because they thought there were superstitions as a whole stage of rational development. So philosophers of this era had a tendency to emphasize human beings themselves. After that, as Enlightenment developed and spread widely among people, especially the bourgeois, who had economic power but had no political power, were greatly welcomed. It was a theory that supported their political rights. It was also one of the underpinnings of the civil revolution centered on the bourgeois as a theory that could break down some of the contradictions of the old French Revolution.

According to Antoine Nicolas de Condorcet, “The Time will... come when the sun will shine only on free men who know no other master but their reason.” (Textbook). Before Enlightenment, they had a lot of focus and absolute belief in God’s will, but because Enlightenment had spread rationalistic ideas, values, and so on, the idea of proving as a

scientific phenomenon rather than a God's will, it can be inferred that scientific revolution, other revolutions, etc. took place. Let's go deeper into the following paragraphs!

To begin with, enlightenment philosophers influenced today's government and politics. No one would cast doubt on the fact that the Age of Enlightenment heavily influenced a lot of legal codes and governmental structures that are still in place these days. For instance, the idea for the three branch system that is outlined in the U.S. Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, was the brainchild of the Constitution. It is also true that Montesquieu, one of the large proponents of the Enlightenment, is the one who suggested the theory of the separation of powers, and this was to better obtain a political system¹ of checks and balances, promoting order and equality.

Moreover, when you take a look at the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence, it is also very easy to recognize how it is influenced by the Principles of the Enlightenment. For example, Thomas Jefferson demanding the pursuit of happiness, as well as the rights of life can be found in the Declaration of Independence. At the same time, it also criticizes the government of England due to the fact that it did not grant the equal representation to colonies.

What Moral philosophers really valued are rationality, science, religious freedom, and what they called "natural rights"²—life, liberty and the pursuit. Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, Charles Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau all developed theories of government under which some or even all the people would rule.

¹ Jessika Toothman, "What Was the Impact of the Age of Enlightenment?," HowStuffWorks (HowStuffWorks, June 8, 2010),

² "BRIA 20 2 c Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau on Government," Constitutional Rights Foundation, accessed November 23, 2020,

Secondly, if it were not for enlightenment philosophers, rights of men would have been totally different compared to how it is today. Before the Enlightenment, the notion that all men had equal rights was not as common as it is today. Hierarchy was extremely entrenched, and therefore, any deviation from it was considered to be risky. Any kind of movement that threatened or disputed this hierarchy would have been crushed.

Not only church, but also the state defended this status quo with theoretical justification like the ‘divine right of kings’, and this explained that monarchs had a God-given right to rule, and this was an implication that any challenge to this rule was against God. However, in the 17th century, multiple scholars emerged arguing that something has to be changed regarding this God-given legitimacy.

John Locke was one of these scholars and he insisted that every man must possess rights that are inalienable from God that made it possible for them to be entitled with life, liberty, and property, and this was what he called “natural rights”. Consequently, there were a lot of enlightenment thinkers that took his ideas a step further. Even after, Founding Fathers created the United States’ Constitution reflecting on Locke’s natural rights and it later expanded them to include “the pursuit of happiness”. Thomas Paine, ³one of the enlightenment thinkers also made these rights much more equitable and just. By the end of the 18th century, declarations of the rights of man eventually became reality. These could have become possible thanks to the enlightenment.

³ Chris Zacharia, “4 Enlightenment Ideas That Changed the World,” History Hit (History Hit, August 19, 2020),

Enlightenment has had a tremendous impact on the scientific revolution and the two are related. While content and awareness of new objects were the only things that science gave us in the past, it has gradually changed the way we think. Beyond imagining and speculating, it turned into measuring, calculating, and experimenting, which helped the development of learning. Thanks to the scientific revolution and enlightenment philosophers, observation and experimentation were emphasized, which also affected the invention of scientific devices such as telescopes and the development of printing techniques.

In addition, modern research methodologies have emerged, and the inductive method of bacon and descartes deductive method could be examples. In this era, Astronomy was also discovered, affecting many changes in European worldviews, and during this period, Newton's law of universal gravitation was revealed. $F=G\frac{m_1m_2}{r^2}$ was also revealed at this time. These findings also increased exchanges between scholars and established a royal-sponsored academic society. This led to the expansion of research into various topics including population, economy, and trade, as well as science. "Don't trust anyone, doubt everything and see for yourself through an experiment." Einstein⁴ became a member after that.

In addition, modern ideas have been developed, applying not only scientific methodologies, but also ways of thinking to understand human society, and empiricism and rationalism are representative. Empiricism is Britain, and rationalism is the content of Europe. Science also affects political reform, and social contract theory, a theory that states and societies emerge through individual agreements or contracts. (transferring only part of an individual's rights to society), the people can revolutionize a new government. Through this,

⁴ Contributors to Wikimedia projects, “German-Born Theoretical Physicist; Developer of the Theory of Relativity (1879–1955),” Wikiquote (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., November 14, 2020),

many civil revolutions have had a tremendous impact on the "scientific revolution and Enlightenment."

Last, but not least, although there must be some people who believe that people in the modern generation are not actually influenced by enlightenment philosophers, I still firmly think that government, rights of men and science today heavily impact enlightenment.

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