

Topic 5.1: THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Enlightenment Terms

General Will is a term popularized by the 18th-century French political philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. In his book *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau defines the *general will* (*volonté générale*) as the civic impulses of citizens seeking to pursue the common good within their community. He contrasts the general will with the *particular will* of individuals seeking only their personal good. Rousseau argues that the general will of the people, not the individual will of a king or the particular wills of nobility or clergy, should produce the laws that govern that community.

Social Contract is a voluntary agreement among people defining the relationship of individuals with one another and with government and by this process forming a distinct organized society. In the 17th and 18th centuries the theory of a social compact among individuals of a society was linked with the doctrine of natural law.

Enlightenment Thinkers

Swiss	Rousseau	1712-1778	General Will Social Contract Society and Education Corrupts Men
English	Locke	1632-1704	General Will Social Contract Life, Liberty, and Property
English	Hobbes	1588-1679	General Will Social Contract Absolutism works
French	Montesquieu	1689-1755	Separation of powers: the executive, legislative, judicial

The main ideas of the Enlightenment were:

- The universe is fundamentally rational, that is, it can be understood through the use of **reason** (logic) alone;
- **Truth** can be arrived at through empirical (direct) observation, the use of reason, and systematic doubt; everything has a cause and effect, which can be discovered through observation and experiments;
- Human **experience** is the foundation of human understanding of truth not authority;
- Religious doctrines have no place in the understanding of the physical and human worlds; **Natural law** makes the universe run.
- All human life, both social and individual, can be understood with the same scientific methods that the natural world can be understood;
- Human beings can be improved through **education** and the development of their rational facilities; there was a new strong belief in **progress** and possibility of a **happy** life for everyone;
- Individuals should be **free** to make up their own minds and form their own opinions without being restricted by superstition, religious dogma, or autocratic/absolutist government.

1. Summarize the main ideas of the Enlightenment in your own words:

2. Predict the effect of Enlightenment ideas on attitudes toward government among the growing educated middle class in Western Europe and the European colonies in the Americas: