Enlightenment Definitions

Natural Philosophy – An early modern term for the study of the nature of the universe, its purpose and how it functioned; it encompassed what today we would call science.

Copernican hypothesis – The idea that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the universe; this had tremendous scientific and religious implications.

Universal law of gravitation – A law stating that every body in the universe attracts every other body in the universe in a precise mathematical relationship; Isaac Newton

Enlightenment – An 18th century intellectual movement whose three central concepts were the use of reason, the scientific method and progress.

Rationalism – The general opinion among Enlightened thinkers that nothing should be accepted on faith and that everything should be subjected to secular critical examination; Rene Descartes; reason is the chief source of knowledge.

Tabula rasa – “Blank tablet”; it is incorporated into Locke’s belief that all ideas are derived from expericnce and that the human mind at birth is like a blank tablet on which the environment writes the individual’s understanding and beliefs.

Philosophes - Intellectuals in France

Separation of Powers – Montesquieu; the belief that political power in society should be shared rather than focused in a single individual or institution.

Salons – Regular social gatherings held by talented and rich Parisian women in their homes, where philosophes and their followers met to discuss literature, science, and philosophy.

Enlightened absolutism – Describes the rule of 18th century monarchs who, without renouncing their own absolute authority, adopted Enlightenment ideals of rationalism, progress, and tolerance.

Geocentric – placing the Earth at the center of the universe.

Ptolemic system – Ptolemy, astronomer; created a model of the universe that is geocentric.

Heliocentric – Nicholas Copernicus; *On Reflections of the Heavenly Spheres*; sun-centered conception of the universe.

Scientific method – a systematic procedure for collecting and analyzing evidence; Francis Bacon

Inductive reasoning – proceed from the particular to the general by making systematic observations and carefully organized experiments to test hypotheses or theories.

Deism – religious philosophy based on reason and natural law; God as a clockmaker

Laissez-faire – “let the people do what they want,” economic idea that the state should not impose government regulations but leave the economy alone; Adam Smith

Social Contract – Rousseau; the concept that an entire society agrees to be governed by its general will, and all individuals should be forced to abide by the general will since it represents what is best for the entire community

Rococo – an artistic style that replaced baroque in the 1730s; it was highly secular, emphasizing grace, charm, and gentle action

Mestizo – a person of mixed European and native American Indian descent

Mulatto – a person of mixed African and European descent

Federal System – a form of government in which power is shared between the national government and state governments

Frederick II (the Great) – Prussian king; enlarged the Prussian army and kept a strict watch over the bureaucracy; abolished torture (except in cases of treason and murder), granted limited freedom of speech and press; greater religious toleration; kept serfdom

Maria Theresa – Austrian Empress; strengthen the power of the state

Catherine the Great – Russia; 1762-1796; listened to enlightened ideas but didn’t change much; expanded her territory towards the Black Sea and took about 50% of Poland

Sor Juana de la Cruz – writer; nun; Mexico; plays and poetry