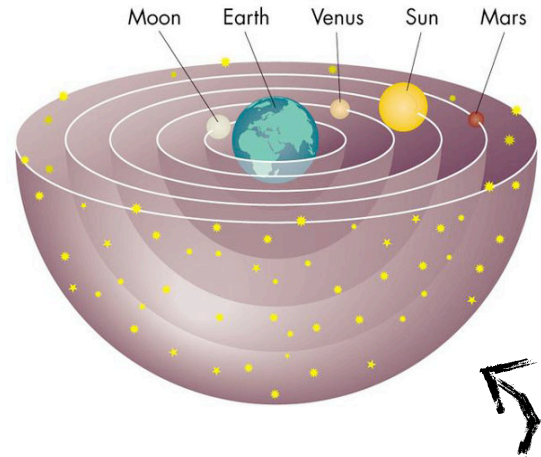


Out of Darkness

A common metaphor for the gaining of knowledge is that of light and darkness. Darkness represents ignorance, or lack of knowledge. Light represents the possession of knowledge. The time period known as the “Enlightenment” is when people began to embrace the power of the human mind to explain the world and solve problems. To best understand the Enlightenment, one must first understand the perceived “darkness” that preceded it.

Europe Before the 1300s: The “Dark Ages”

Before the 1300s, knowledge was made up of traditions that were approved by the Catholic Church and superstitions. The Church believed that humans were wretched creatures, capable of nothing good apart from Jesus Christ. These sinful, uneducated humans were in need of a Shepard to guide them and a savior to save them. The Church felt it was their job to navigate these lost people safely through their life, otherwise both this life and the next were doomed. This was further supported with the “Divine Right of Kings”; that God appointed an Absolute Monarch to lead these helpless people.



Traditions were the knowledge handed down over generations that had become accepted as truth. An example of this would be Aristotle’s works, which sought to explain nature and the universe. Aristotle stated that everything was made of a combination of four substances: earth, air, fire and water. He also stated that the Earth was at the center of the universe, with the planets orbiting the earth, followed by the stars.

Superstitions are widely held, but unjustified beliefs used to explain why and how things happen. In many cultures it was believed in the “evil eye,” or as the Italians and Hawaiians called it, the stink eye. Giving someone the evil eye would be to curse someone with an intense, envious stare. The evil eye could cause bad luck, disease or even death. The young were particularly vulnerable to its effects, but it could be used against adults and cattle. Those with light eyes (blue, green) and those who had great authority or popularity were thought to have special ability to cast such curses. Certain jewelry and prayers could be used to protect from the evil eye. If a person believes themselves to be cursed by someone’s evil eye, they could drop olive oil into hot water. If it floats, everything is good. If the olive oil sinks, there is the curse. Fear not, there was a way to be “healed.”



A symbol to ward off the “evil eye.”

- The “cursed” and the “healer” start yawning multiple times.
- The healer makes a cross with their hand three times
- The healer then spits in the air three times.
- Voila! Curse removed

Evil eyes were not the least of a person’s concerns. Uncracked egg shells could be used by witches to sail out to sea and cause storms. A hat left on the bed could cause sickness and death. Mirrors can hold the spirit of those who look into them (which is why vampires do not have a reflection). Women who sit on the edges of tables will never marry. Counting a person’s teeth could take years off of their life. And always make sure to return home through the same door you left. These are a small handful of the many widely held superstitions.

1300s-1600s: Renaissance & Scientific Revolution

The rediscovery of old Greek and Roman texts sparked new intellectual life into Europe. This spark fanned into flames with the return of Christian intellectuals after the fall of Constantinople. Europe began to embrace humanism, believing that humans are great and can do great things. They celebrated the Renaissance, or rebirth, of human thought and the ability to use logic and reason. This blossomed into the Scientific Revolution, where people began to use their logic and reason to explain the world around them.



Initially, the purpose these early scientist was to enrich the church and help glorify the Christian God. The Catholic Church, however, did not like being questioned and tortured those whose findings did not agree with Catholic teaching. When Copernicus developed his sun-centered universe theory, he kept it hidden until his death for fear of persecution. Galileo was convicted of heresy and put on house arrest for his support of Copernicus. It was not until Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation divided the church and removed the authority of the Catholic church from Central Europe that scientists felt they had safe places to do their work. Paired with the Gutenberg Press, the base of knowledge began to rapidly expand, as did peoples' willingness to question authority.

The Catholic Church was not the only institution people began to question. People began to use reason and logic to question Monarchy's right to rule; believing that the Divine Right of Kings was not a good justification for political power. The Monarchs of France and England soon entangled themselves in civil wars with their parliaments; seeking to squash these raucous rebellions. France's King Louis XIV defeated the French parliament and instituted an Absolute Monarchy. In the English Civil War, the parliament won; capturing and beheading the "divinely appointed" King Charles I. As the axe fell, a shock wave was sent across all of Europe and marked the dawn of a new era.



1650s-1800: The Enlightenment

As the dust settled from the English Civil War, it ushered in the period that become known as the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was a period of time when people used reason and logic to reform and progress society. It was believed that humans are inherently good and, by using scientific reasoning, could be perfected. Logic and reason were used to enhance and progress all aspects of society, including: politics, science, music, art, education, and religion. The Enlightenment thinkers specifically advocated for religious tolerance, equality before the law, democracy and the advancement of science.



The first wave of Enlightened thinkers arose in England. The movement quickly spread to Paris, France; which became the unofficial capital of Enlightenment thinking. These intellectual thinkers became known as the Philosophes. The causal gathers of the Philosophes were called Salons, which is based on the French word of living room. Salons saw the meeting of some of histories greatest minds, starting academic traditions that would last for hundreds of years.

Enlightenment thinkers intentionally challenged ideas and traditions rooted in religion. Some went so far in their questioning of the church that they directly questioned the very existence of

God/gods. This led to the birth of both Deism and Atheism. Deism is the belief in a supreme being, but he doesn't interfere. Like a clockmaker, he created the universe and now sits back and just watches everything tick. Atheist believe that "God" doesn't exist and that there are no supernatural beings or powers. To Atheist, the human mind is the epitome of all nature and can explain all things using reason.

The Enlightenment movement was best summarized in 1702 by a Frenchman, Bernard de Fontenelle, who optimistically said that this new century "will become more enlightened day by day, so that all previous centuries will be lost in darkness by comparison."

Questions

1) Fill out this chart with notes for how each time period answered the following questions:

Subjects	> 1300s	1300-1600s	1650-1800s
Who has the Right to Rule?			
Source of Knowledge?			
Nature of Man?			
Christianity/Religion in Europe?			

- 2) The Catholic Church and the Philosophes disagreed on whether humans were inherently good or bad. Create a pretend conversation between a member of the Catholic Church and a Philosophe, as they debate the nature of man. Use key points and references from the texts, as well as examples to illustrate each side's key points.
- 3) Choose a superstition from the reading. Create a fictional story or comic strip showing the superstition in action.
 - *Example idea:* Susie Q sits on the edge of a table. At the dance the next day, none of the boys want to dance with her.
- 4) In an 8-12 sentence paragraph, explain the step-by-step progression of how Europe went from the Tradition/Superstition to the Enlightenment.
 - Create an outline of the key points/events
 - *Optional topic sentence:* Europe transitioned from believing superstitions in the Middle Ages to using reason in the Enlightenment.
- 5) Why do you think the "Enlightenment" began in England?
- 6) What is Deism? What is Atheism? Why did the Enlightenment thinkers shift away from Christianity and towards these religious view points?
- 7) Re-write Bernard de Fontenelle's quote in your own words. What did Fontenelle mean when he used the metaphors of light and darkness?
- 8) Why do you think historians refer to the time periods as the Dark Ages, Renaissance and Enlightenment? Explain.