

CHAPTER 19

Culture and Society in Eighteenth-Century Europe

OUTLINE

I. Happy Families

The concept of personal happiness as a desirable goal was a creation of the Enlightenment during the eighteenth century. Individuals and families measured their happiness as a reflection of the success of their societies. Yet as the wealthy pursued happiness through possessions and servants, the poor were often content with survival.

II. Eighteenth-Century Culture

A. Introduction

The eighteenth century created a lavish and costly aristocratic culture. One of the most enduring results of this affluent culture was patronage of music. Noble patrons hired musicians and conductors, who were expected to cater to the whims of their aristocratic benefactors. When musicians proved too independent, as did Mozart, they failed to prosper. The literary and philosophical counterpart of musical patronage was the creation of urban salons, where influential thinkers exposed their ideas to an aristocratic audience and other members of the intellectual elite.

B. The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment reflected a set of attitudes critical of traditional European customs and morals. Those who adopted Enlightenment techniques of criticism were called *philosophes*. Although the Enlightenment began in France, its methods rapidly spread to the rest of Europe.

C. The Spirit of the Enlightenment

Three of the most important Enlightenment *philosophes* were Francois-Marie Arouet (called Voltaire) of France, David Hume of Scotland, and Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron Montesquieu. In 1734 Voltaire, a French intellectual active in the salons of Paris, issued a laudatory editorial on English society entitled *Philosophical Letters Concerning the English Nation*. Its criticism of French society and the Roman Catholic Church stimulated an intellectual and philosophical revival that rapidly spread beyond the borders of France. In his early career, Voltaire was essentially a satirist of all traditional European culture—including the royalty. Exiled from France for his audacity, Voltaire traveled to England and remained there for two years. His praise of England in comparison to France caused the *philosophe* to retreat from Paris to the countryside. Following the death of his mistress, Voltaire traveled in Prussia and Switzerland—wearing out his welcome in both places. The end of his life was devoted to tireless assaults on Roman Catholicism. A university scholar, Hume spent most of his life as an author of philosophical treatises

(largely unread during his lifetime) and histories (broadly popular). Hume was the ultimate skeptic who refused to accept the Cartesian synthesis and relegated all natural laws to the relativism of mental perception. He was, even during his own lifetime, renowned as an enemy of Christianity. Like Hume, Baron Montesquieu received university training. His most popular early work was *Persian Letters*, a satire of traditional European social organization and culture. Following a visit to Britain, Montesquieu undertook a comparative study of forms of government, *The Spirit of Laws*. In his work, Montesquieu advocated balanced constitutions as those most likely to maximize the pleasure of the governed. Enlightenment thinkers believed that the world could be reshaped by the proper application of scientific principles. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke developed theories of education based on sense experience rather than moral indoctrination. Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Hutcheson and Cesare Beccaria advocated social reform based on the concept of securing the greatest pleasure and the promotion of happiness. Some Enlightenment *philosophes* began to advocate the concept of progress based on reform and social evolution. Man was seen as a raw form capable of molding his society according to his personal experience. Mankind responded principally to pleasure and pain—one acted to maximize pleasure and reduce pain. According to the *philosophes*, the object of all governments should be “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” The Enlightenment world could not only be controlled, it could be managed for improvement. For the *philosophes*, progress was an identifiable goal.

D. The Impact of the Enlightenment

Intended for public consumption, it was inevitable that the Enlightenment would have some influence on European society. Curiously, political reform was embraced more willingly in eastern Europe than in the west. The three aspects of government most immediately affected were law, education, and the spread of religious toleration. In Austria, Prussia, and Russia, legal codification was undertaken, though not necessarily completed. As the Enlightenment thinkers commonly attacked the Jesuits, the religious order most associated with education in eastern Europe, the states had to create new educational institutions. Throughout the east, compulsory education programs were initiated. Religious toleration was readily granted in Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The strict regulation of minority sects was somewhat alleviated in western Europe, although general toleration did not exist in England, Spain, or France. Also influential were Enlightenment theories of economics. In France, the physiocrats developed the theory that all wealth came from land, either directly or indirectly. State wealth should be based on taxation on the land. Physiocrats also proposed that the state should intervene as little as possible in private economic endeavor—the doctrine of *laissez-faire*. The ideas of the physiocrats and the Scottish intellectual Adam Smith provided the foundations for economic reform in the nineteenth century.

III. Eighteenth-Century Society

A. Introduction

Although eighteenth-century society remained highly stratified and hierarchical, it was inexorably altered by the emergence of the bourgeoisie.

B. The Nobility

At the pinnacle of society was the nobility. Those identified as aristocrats varied enormously in wealth, but the wealthiest members of the estate established the lifestyle to which all aspired. Wealth continued to be reckoned primarily in terms of the profit from ownership of land. The European aristocracy were consumers of luxury products and patrons of the arts. Their support of intellectuals and authors led to the Enlightenment as an expression of aristocratic culture. In all European countries the nobility was distinguished by degrees of privilege. It was common, however, for the aristocracy to be divided into the truly wealthy and those who simply held titles but not necessarily wealth. The chief measure of noble wealth was possession of land, and aristocratic families devised various strategies to maintain their families' real property. In addition to land, nomination to national office often implied elevation to the nobility. Members of the aristocracy were supposed to engage in conspicuous consumption. They commonly spent huge sums on lavish palaces and country homes, grand tours of Europe, and patronage of the intellectuals. A universal aristocratic culture spawned a homogeneous European nobility.

C. The Bourgeoisie

Beneath the aristocracy were the bourgeoisie, the largely urban commercial class. Like the nobility, the bourgeoisie also developed a distinctive culture in the eighteenth century. At the center of bourgeois culture was the family and the home. Among the commercial classes, romantic love and paternal affection replaced the unemotional households of prior centuries.

The numbers of the bourgeoisie were greatest where the density of urbanization was greatest. The bourgeois percentage of the population varied from a high in the Netherlands to a low in Russia. The bourgeoisie was composed of various groups: wholesale merchants and international traders, retail shopkeepers, financiers, and professionals. As the pace of urbanization quickened during the eighteenth century, the number of the bourgeoisie multiplied. Mobility was characteristic of the various groups within the bourgeoisie. There was constant movement from the cities to rural estates in the countryside, as bourgeois families sought to move up the social ladder to the ranks of the nobility through the acquisition of real property.

Though they did not achieve solidarity as a class, the bourgeoisie did create a homogeneous culture. Merchants adopted more luxurious styles of dress, silverware, carriages, and homes. Like the nobility, the bourgeoisie began to travel. In the case of the commercial classes, seaside resorts and baths were popular diversions. Greater wealth permitted more leisure. In response, theaters and music halls were developed to attract those with money and the time to spend it. By their purchase of tickets, the bourgeoisie became patrons of the arts. The expansion of the bourgeoisie led to greater literacy and the consequent rise in the

number of cheaply printed books, newspapers, and magazines. The publications ran the gamut from light entertainment to serious political commentary.

Family life became the central feature of bourgeois culture. Prior to the eighteenth century, family life was typified by a lack of affectional bonds between family members—between husband and wife, between parents and children. Families were patriarchal, and parental authority over children was based on discipline. Under the Enlightenment's encouragement for the pursuit of personal happiness, family life was transformed in the second half of the eighteenth century. Personal affection became a more common element of relationships between spouses. Domestic architecture permitted privacy for personal pursuits away from children and servants. Women typically bore fewer children, improving the quality of relationships between parents and children. Leisure and recreation became a normal part of childhood. The Enlightenment emphasis on education gave rise to the publication of didactic children's books. Increased wealth allowed both the leisure and money for parental investment in childhood education. Such advantages were not available to the working classes, where family life remained little changed.

D. The Masses

The poor of the eighteenth century shared few of the advantages of the nobility or the bourgeoisie. Despite the availability of greater supplies of food, additional housing, and more generous welfare, poverty was more prevalent than ever before—especially in the cities. Like the other classes, the poor did benefit from the establishment of a class culture that included a greater number of literate members of the working class than ever before.

The eighteenth century saw continuous and accelerating population growth unchecked by the sorts of demographic crises that had served to limit population in previous centuries. Thomas Malthus theorized that war, disease, and shortages in the food supply were natural, if tragic, controls on unlimited expansion of the population. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, late marriages, clerical celibacy, and extraordinarily high death rates in the sprawling cities limited population growth. The eighteenth century reversed these trends. Women married at an earlier age, and the number of illegitimate births increased. As fertility rates improved, death rates fell. The plague made its last appearances in the seventeenth century. The impact of war was lessened. As a result, the number of people in Europe continuously grew after 1740.

An increase in agricultural productivity fueled the population increase. The problems of open-field agriculture were alleviated in the eighteenth century. New techniques included the voluntary enclosure of the open fields, introduction of fodder crops to replace fallow, and selective breeding in animal husbandry. New crops imported from the New World, such as corn and potatoes, offered new sources of nutrition. In many cases, the cause of increased agricultural productivity was simply an increase in the amount of acreage under cultivation. Particularly in eastern Europe, more land was brought into the agricultural system. Agriculture also responded to the upswing in the demand by creating a more efficient market. Farmers specialized in crops for distant markets rather than produce for local subsistence. It is also possible that the climate became warmer and wetter, thus creating a more hospitable environment for agricultural productivity.

As more people were born and survived the rigors of early childhood, the ranks of the impoverished swelled. Perhaps 10 percent of the European population existed on the edge of starvation in complete poverty. Forty percent were essentially unemployed. The value of labor fell as the price of necessities such as food rose. Land was less available as more people sought to establish households. Poverty in the countryside forced those without access to land to emigrate to the cities, the frontiers of eastern Europe, or the New World. Squalor in the overcrowded ghettos of eighteenth-century cities was appalling. No charities were able to stem the rising tide of misery. Hospitals were converted into holding pens for the indigent—the young and the old were crowded into conditions that guaranteed swift death. Crime soared in the cities, with the poor the most common victims.

Despite the overwhelming numbers of the poor, some among the working classes managed comfortable lifestyles. For those with some security and leisure, popular culture emerged to parallel the culture of the nobility and the bourgeoisie. Education increased literacy amongst the working classes. In response, a market for popular literature in the guise of religious tracts, almanacs, serialized romances, and melodramatic tales of the Middle Ages emerged. More common recreation for the working classes consisted of festivals, sporting events, and blood sports. While the nobility had their salons and the bourgeoisie met in theaters, the working-class meeting place was the tavern.

TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

Voltaire's *Philosophical Letters*
 Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*
 first volume of the *Encyclopedia*

Rousseau's *The Social Contract*
 Malthus' *Essay on the Principles of Population*
 Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

1690	
1734	
1748	
1751	
1762	
1798	

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.

hidalgos
 grandees
philosophes
 Adam Smith
 Voltaire
 deists
 progress
 market agriculture
 domesticity
 laissez-faire
 Patent of toleration

peerage
 Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Encyclopedia
 Cesare Beccaria
 David Hume
 John Locke
 religious toleration
 bourgeoisie
 Thomas Malthus
 fodder crops
 Skepticism

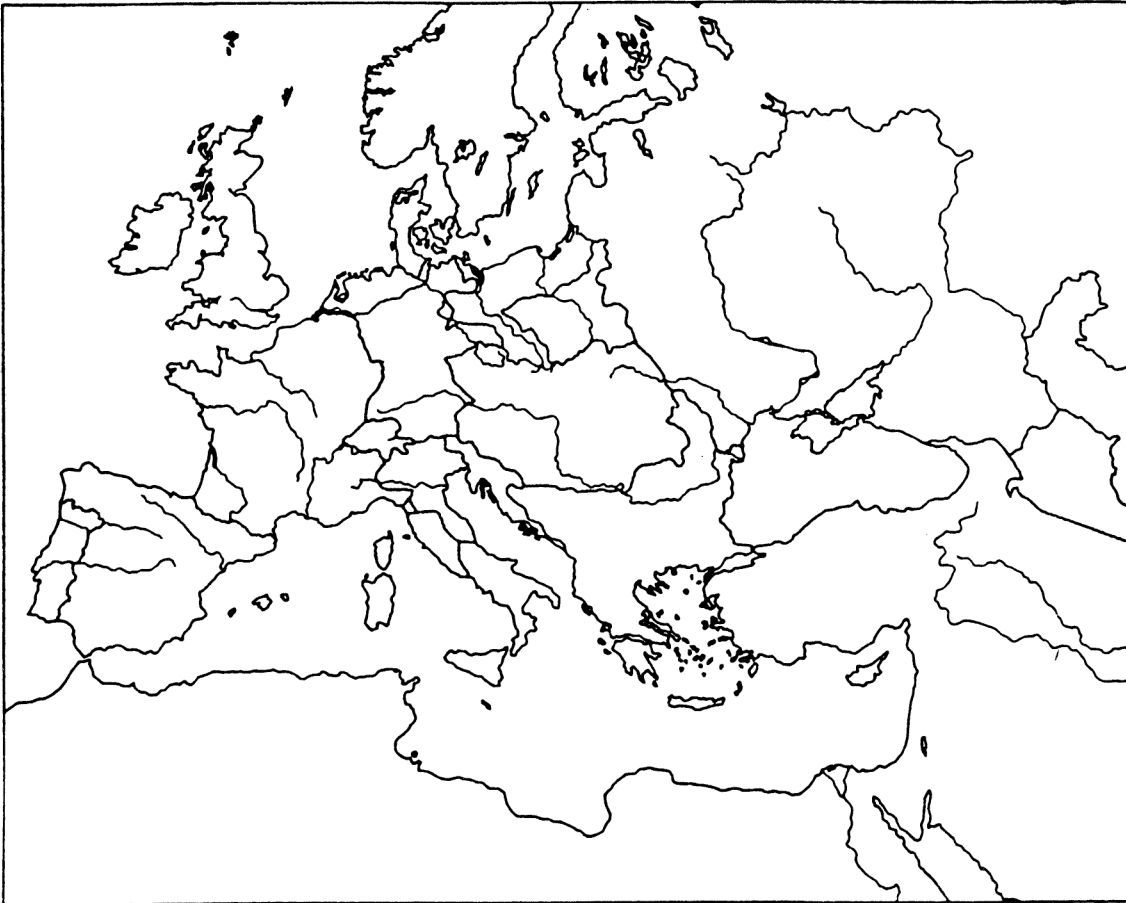
gentry
 Enlightenment
 Denis Diderot
 Immanuel Kant
 Montesquieu
 optimism
 physiocrats
 petit bourgeois
 "manure barrier"
 Salons

MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter.

1. How does the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas compare with that of the scientific revolution? [See Map Exercise in Chapter 17.]
2. What accounts for the rapid dissemination of Enlightenment ideas? Consider both technology and the state of Europe's diplomacy during this period.
3. Locate the following places on the map.
 - a. In what country did the following philosophers work?

Diderot	Voltaire	Hume
Beccaria	Kant	Smith
 - b. In which countries did monarchs attempt to impose reforms based on the Enlightenment?
 - c. Where was the 1755 earthquake that deeply affected Voltaire?



MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. What were the contributions of Voltaire, Hume, and Montesquieu? How did these men reflect the general world view of the Enlightenment?
2. Why did the thinkers of the Enlightenment believe in optimism and progress?
3. What impact did the Enlightenment have on European governments? Where was this impact felt most completely?
4. Define, in so far as possible, the European nobility. In what ways did they differ from country to country?
5. Who were the bourgeoisie? What determined membership in this social classification?
6. What was the nature of bourgeois culture? How did the bourgeois family change?
7. What accounts for the great population increase of the eighteenth century? Why were changes in the agricultural system of Europe critical to population growth?
8. What accounts for the growing problem of poverty among the masses?
9. What was the nature of mass culture?

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

The following questions test your ability to summarize the major conclusions of the chapter.

1. The rapid dissemination of Enlightenment ideas and culture resembles in many ways the rapid spread of the scientific revolution that preceded it. In what ways was the Enlightenment similar? In what ways did it differ in fundamental assumptions and in the types of social questions it attempted to resolve?
2. How did the social system of the eighteenth century contrast with that of the sixteenth century? [See Chapter 15.] Were there any similarities?

SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. Which of the following statements concerning the European nobility is MOST accurate?
 - a. The nobility throughout Europe was an undifferentiated class.
 - b. All who were still performed a significant function as fighting men.
 - c. All who were noble were wealthy.
 - d. The nobility had ceased to play a role in national governments.
 - e. The nobility in the eighteenth century no longer enjoyed special legal privileges.
2. The collection that attempted to summarize all acquired knowledge was the
 - a. *Almanach des Prisons*.
 - b. *Omnibus*.
 - c. *Dictionnaire*.
 - d. *Encyclopedia*.
 - e. *Treatise on Human Nature*.
3. In government, Montesquieu advocated
 - a. enlightened despotism.
 - b. separation of powers.
 - c. pure democracy.
 - d. Plato's *Republic*.
 - e. dictatorship of the proletariat
4. What was the academic discipline of the French thinkers known as physiocrats?
 - a. Psychology
 - b. Economics
 - c. Theology
 - d. Chemistry
 - e. Medicine
5. At the end of the eighteenth century, the European bourgeoisie
 - a. was shrinking in size and economic importance.
 - b. comprised less than 20 percent of the population, even in those states where they were most numerous.
 - c. often lived in the countryside.
 - d. comprised an undifferentiated class of wealthy financiers.
 - e. was the most dominant political group.
6. In the eighteenth century, improvements in food supply, housing, and sanitation led to
 - a. a utopian existence for all.
 - b. an end to social protests because fewer people were experiencing poverty.
 - c. allowed more poor people to survive despite living in poverty.
 - d. an increased tax base for the state.
 - e. decline of the aristocracy.

7. Which of the following was NOT an aspect of 18th century bourgeois culture?
- Travel
 - Conspicuous consumption
 - titles of nobility
 - Theater and music halls
 - Companionate marriage
8. In which of the following ways did the bourgeois concept of family change?
- Changes in the construction of homes permitted married couples greater privacy and intimacy.
 - The eighteenth-century family became matriarchal.
 - Greater concern for family togetherness led to increasing numbers of children for bourgeois couples.
 - Parents were less concerned over the care and education of children.
 - Spouses began to spend less time together.
9. Where in Europe was there the greatest rate of population growth during the eighteenth century?
- Russia and Hungary
 - England
 - France and Spain
 - Prussia
 - The Balkans and Italy
10. Which of the following statements concerning mass culture is most accurate?
- The European poor, even in the most advanced countries, were almost entirely literate.
 - The literate European masses were most attracted to melodramatic tales of knights and ladies from the age of chivalry.
 - The rise of literacy brought an end to those community festivals that had characterized earlier periods of European life.
 - The consumption of alcoholic beverages began to decrease during the eighteenth century.
 - Village fairs and religious holidays were sources of greater community conflict.