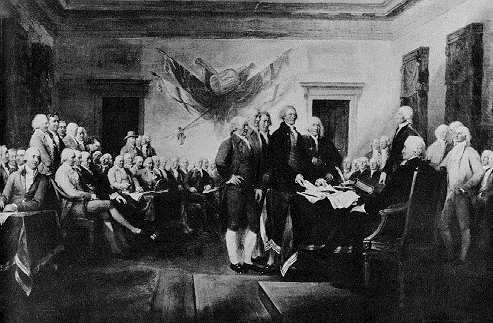
**The Age of Reason (1660 - 1780)**



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**The Age of Reason Overview**

The Age of Reason (Enlightenment) in England was a widespread intellectual and literary movement that took place in Europe and England. The movement was shaped by the idea of rationalism (reliance on reason as the best guide for belief and action). The age encouraged intellectual freedom as well as freedom from prejudice, religious beliefs, and politics. Unlike the Enlightenment in Europe, the Age of Reason in England gave equal credit to experience and reason while in the process of regarding the human condition. Because of that, it is therefore less "rational" than various versions of the Enlightenment in France and other countries. Moreover, numerous writers in England, however, were averse toward the rationalist ideals of social advancement and human "perfectibility". To the very least, people at the time, especially in Europe, were more interested in character, ethics, self-understanding, comprehension of their society, and knowledge of one another. One of the works of [John Locke](http://www.blupete.com/Literature/Biographies/Philosophy/Locke.htm), *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), was a verbally expressed image of the society during that period. One of the quotes indicated that, "our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct." Last but not least, it was an era that heralded the scientific method.

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| For centuries, Europeans had turned to two sources to explain the world around them—religion and the occult. Science existed, but was subservient to the theological needs of the church, and whatever could not be understood by science was clearly the result of mystical forces or God's inexplicable will.  This traditional system was disrupted in 1543, when Nicholas Copernicus challenged the long-standing scientific truth that the Sun revolved around the Earth. His calculations convinced him that it had to work the other way around. Church authorities were horrified.  But it was becoming clear to many astronomers and mathematicians that theological explanations were insufficient. They did not describe the scientific reality uncovered by careful observation. As scientists rejected the perceived wisdom of religious authorities, the spirit of inquiry infected other disciplines as well. By the eighteenth century, this pervasive rationalism had blossomed into a broad intellectual movement called the Enlightenment.  Enlightenment thinkers refused to countenance the notion that the world was a mysterious place. Human reason could explain nature and could improve social life as well. As literacy and education spread, more and more Europeans had access to the positive, proactive notions circulating in salons and universities and private academies. And this new audience took Enlightenment principles seriously—sometimes more seriously than their creators intended. Women questioned the traditional dictates that prevented them from pursuing formal higher education; Anglo-American colonists in North America denied the validity of a form of government as hidebound and unreasonable as the British monarchy.   |  | | --- | | Copyright © 1995-2010, Pearson Education, Inc., publishing as Pearson Prentice Hall [Legal and Privacy Terms](http://www.pearsoned.com/legal/index.htm) | |

**John Locke**

**Major Ideas of the Age of Reason**

During the Enlightenment, new ideas and new methods of learning were setting the stage for great revolutions to come. Beginning in the 17th century, the philosophers had all accepted the rationalism of Descartes. Then, natural science became engrossed in the area. [Sir Isaac Newton](http://web.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhatch/pages/01-Courses/current-courses/08sr-newton.htm), an English physicist, had discovered an underlying cosmic law of universal gravitation and motion. The 18th century was succumbed by a positive and experimental mentality. A suggestion of a "noble savage" was readily accepted by [Rousseau](http://ets.uidaho.edu/eng258_1/rousseau/JJRBio.htm) and the encyclopedists. Alongside the philosophers' view of knowledge through the acquisition of logic and science, there was also an emphasis placed on the "particular rather than the general", "observable facts rather than principles", and "experience rather than rational speculation." [Voltaire](http://www.evsc.k12.in.us/schoolzone/schools/EMPOWER/harrison/th/voltaire.htm), probably the greatest humanist during the Age of Reason, embraced the idea of the brotherhood of man and the essential goodness of man. Encyclopedists at the time believed that societies must be in harmony with "metaphysical norms." They popularized the idea of progress and utilized the Leibnitz idea of continuity.

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| http://www.angelfire.com/journal/LiteratureOfEngland/Pictures/Newton.jpg | http://www.angelfire.com/journal/LiteratureOfEngland/Pictures/Rosseau.jpg | http://www.angelfire.com/journal/LiteratureOfEngland/Pictures/Voltaire.jpg |
| **Sir Isaac Newton** | **Jean-Jacques Rosseau** | **Francois Marie Arouet (Voltaire)** |

**Major Events during Age of Reason**

One of the earliest and most important event was the Restoration of 1660. The Puritan government collapsed and [King Charles II](http://www.shepton-mallet.org.uk/history/history_charles2_bio.html) returned succesfully to the throne. A handful of years passed before two major events took place during Charles' rule. London endured two misfortunes in a lightning-quick sequence. In 1665, a plague spread throughout the city killing more than 70,000 people. Soon after the plagued died off, fire appeared in June 1666, and ran uncontrollably for five days. 13,000 houses were burned down, approximately 100 churches were destroyed, and 2/3 of the population were displaced. [James II](http://encarta.msn.com/find/Concise.asp?z=1&pg=2&ti=761570476), the brother of Charles II, succeeded him. His oldest daughter, Mary, and her husband William of Orange, all the same, ousted Mary's father in the year of 1688. This event was appropriately called the Glorious Revolution because there were no mass murder involved. James II sensibly fled to France.

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| http://www.angelfire.com/journal/LiteratureOfEngland/Pictures/George_II.jpg | http://www.angelfire.com/journal/LiteratureOfEngland/Pictures/jamesii.gif |
| **King Charles II of England** | **King James II** |

**The Age of Reason authors & their works**

Changes took place in literature beginning with the use of Greek or Roman models by [Ben Jonson](http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/jonson/benbio.htm) in the beginning of the 17th century. Love sonnets were substituted for satirical verses intended toward reforming the individual and society. The closed or heroic couplet was widely introduced by [John Dryden](http://encarta.msn.com/find/Concise.asp?z=1&pg=2&ti=761568283) and later perfected by [Alexander Pope](http://generationterrorists.com/bio/pope.html). During the beginning of the 18th century, the middle class both grew in size and in wealth. Middle-class readers began buying more and more books concerning realistic situations that pertain to themselves. Demands for more books led to *Pamela* (1740) written by [Samuel Richardson](http://landow.stg.brown.edu/c32/johnson/sjbio.html) and *Tom Jones* (1749) written by [Henry Fielding](http://kirjasto.sci.fi/hfieldin.htm). Literary periods such as *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, both published by Richard Steele and [Joseph Addison](http://www.avsands.com/addison-av.htm) were written with the purpose of "educating" the people. Maybe most renown moralist and best prose satirist during the Age of Reason was [Jonathan Swift](http://www.incompetech.com/authors/swift/). His satiric writing style lent itself to bringing forth the evils of society and the individual. *A Modest Proposal* and *Gulliver's Travels* were two of his finest writings. One of the great writers of the Age of Reason during the later years of 1744-1780 was [Samuel Johnson](http://elvis.rowan.edu/~kilroy/JEK/12/12.html). In addition to writing several writing materials including periodical essays and pamphlets, his three projects were the most highly recognized: an extensive English dictionary, an edited version of an edition of Shakespeare, and *Lives of the Poet*.

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| **John Dryden** | **Alexander Pope** | **Jonathan Swift** |