To this point, we have encountered changes, as well as continuity, in European politics, economics, society, and thought. Each of these developments contributed to a transformation that some consider the most fundamental transformation of the century -- the emergence, between the state sector and private economic sphere, of autonomous institutions of civil society, often described as the “public sphere”. This chapter discusses the public sphere as both a topic in eighteenth-century European thought and as multiple sites of social interaction. Traditional European forms of sociability in eighteenth-century Europe were corporate groupings, based on common birth (such as an order), trade (such as a guild), or religious belief (such as a confraternity). Yet voluntary association for mutual interest greatly expanded in the eighteenth century, as both formal structures -- joint stock and limited liability corporations, scientific and literary academies, reading rooms and libraries -- and as informal, convivial gatherings in private homes, coffee houses, and taverns. These gatherings allow us to view not only the new forms of eighteenth-century sociability but the cultural practices and transmission of knowledge that took place within them.

The “Public Use of Reason”

The essential characteristic of the eighteenth-century public sphere was the existence of physical as well as conceptual spaces that were neither private property held by an individual nor corporative property (such as the privileges belonging to a social order, a town or a guild). In the public sphere, as theorized by such advocates of civil society as John Locke, individuals associated with each other as individuals, free from constraining obligations and equal in the eyes of the law. A “public” entity, as conceived in the eighteenth century, was defined not as an institution supported by the state but as one constituted by free individuals. Kant, in his famous 1784 essay on “Enlightenment,” described the public use of reason as that of “a scholar before the reading public,” who does not seek to promote a particular interest. “Private use” of reason, by contrast, would be made by someone holding “a particular civil …office,” such as an officer in the army. While public actions were taken based on a general knowledge and for the general good, private actions were those taken for a specific interest -- ones’ own, the king’s or an employer’s – and could only be
based on a limited (or “particular”) knowledge of the situation. As Prussian king Frederick the Great explained in a decree of 1784: “A private person has no right to pass public … disapproving judgment on [the] actions … of sovereigns. [A] private person is not capable of making such judgment;” only the sovereign, without personal interest, has the “complete knowledge of circumstances and motives” to discern the public good.¹

In commenting on the concept of “publicity” (offentlichkeit, literally “openness”), Kant and other Enlightenment-era writers considered “public” activities to be economically and intellectually productive work – whether performed for the state or not -- that produced commodities whose value could be measured through exchange with others (such as food, retail goods, books, or even ideas). By contrast, they defined as “private” all acts of consumption or work done to serve another -- including that of a government clerk on official business, a soldier under orders, or of a mother feeding or rearing children in her family home. Kant, in other writings, described as “private” matters that we might describe today as “personal,”) such as aesthetic judgment and ethical decisions, and he did not consider such issues to be properly resolved in the public sphere. As Lawrence Klein has pointed out, "what people in the eighteenth century most often meant by 'public' was sociable as opposed to solitary (which was 'private').... people at home, both men and women, were not necessarily in private."²

While Kant’s idea of public-ness thus did not include family and domestic life, some of his contemporaries – notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose ideas about family life we discussed in the previous chapter -- did consider such matters crucial to their, very different conceptions of the public sphere. Both of these theories implied an exclusion of not only domestic and conjugal life from the public sphere, but of women as well. For this reason, many historians of the eighteenth-century have pointed out how, to understand the birth of the modern public sphere in the eighteenth century, we must also understand “private

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1 Kant, “Was ist Äuflarung,” 1784. Note that Kant’s usage appears to invert the generally accepted meaning of “public” and “private” of our own day, which refer respectively to state-sponsored entities which serve the interests of all people and entities that belong to an individual or group and serve on that particular interest. Frederick’s decree is quoted by James Van Horn Melton, Rise of the Public in Eighteenth-Century Europe (2001) 8.

life,” including personal consumption, interior thought, and unpaid productive work such as raising children. These activities shed light on how individuals came to think of themselves and their social relationships, including their political views and actions, so that private life constitutes part of the history of the public sphere in the age of Enlightenment.

The term “public” held great importance in classical political rhetoric, and it re-entered the European political vocabulary during the Renaissance, as part of the res publica or “public thing,” meaning that which is constituted and shared by the people. In early modern political writing, the term described a new conception of sovereignty, by which the state was not personal property of a ruler but instead a commonwealth. This usage evolved, of course, into the idea of a “republic” described earlier. By the eighteenth century, the term “public” referred most frequently not to the state itself but to those “public things” where people gathered and shared ideas. For historians, the challenge is not merely to understand the idea of “the public” in the eighteenth century but to describe the forms by which people actually interacted and what those interactions meant to them.

Kant advanced an idea of a public sphere as open to all who were willing to engage as free and equal individuals in debate that would be resolved on rational grounds. As described by the Earl of Shaftesbury early in the eighteenth century, public conversation would be characterized by adherence to rules of etiquette that made rational debate possible. Shaftesbury believed that in a public and open forum, politeness would be employed in “free conversation.” By this he meant that by following rules of order, participants could exercise their liberty of thought and expression, balanced by a respect for, and reciprocity towards, other participants. The key to such polite exchanges would be the participants’ ability to engage in genuine intellectual dispute by using wit to ensure no offense would be given or taken. If participants adhered to rules of “politeness” in their interaction, then anyone could be included, and no restrictions would be necessary. Conversely, only if participants were free to act as they believed appropriate would the reasonable man or woman prefer such civility and remain in the conversation. Thus, polite conversation enabled interaction in a fashion “true” to human nature. “All politeness,” Shaftesbury wrote, “is owing to liberty.”

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3 Lawrence Klein, Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness (1994).
Enlightenment Sociability: Salons and Academies

Open, rational conversation – in which the consensus would be determined by the most convincing argument, rather than by the participant with the greatest wealth or social standing – exemplified the ideal of the Enlightened public sphere. However, actual forms of public interaction were much more complicated. No social interaction was open to all comers or free from internal hierarchy. Indeed, many forms of sociability often described by eighteenth-century scholars as “public” were in fact very exclusive and restrictive – and intensely hierarchical in their functioning. No example better illustrates these characteristics of elite sociability than “salons.” Often celebrated as a democratic and egalitarian form of interaction and thus an embodiment of modern civil society, more recent research has shown that elite social gatherings were varied in form and in function, only sometimes devoted to intellectual pursuits.

The most famous venue of intellectual sociability during the Enlightenment, that of Madame Geoffrin, actually gathered writers only one afternoon per week for discussion. On other afternoons, the hostess invited her husband’s business associates and wealthy aristocrats for discussions that more closely resembled a chamber of commerce luncheon. Certain evenings, Madame Geoffrin served supper to smaller, more intimate groups, which often featured royal ministers, foreign ambassadors, and young aristocratic women. On the rare occasions when a writer, such as Jean-François Marmontel, would be invited to such a dinner party, he would be asked to read a work or recite a poem and then leave – and not invited to participate in the conversation. 4

The work of Madame Geoffrin and other women who hosted such gatherings has led some historians to argue that these “salonières” set the tone and enforced the rules which made civil and open conversation possible. These scholars have suggested that the role of women in overseeing such conversations demonstrate that the actual eighteenth-century public sphere was not distinctly masculine. 5 An interesting example of women who actively participated in public debate were the so-called “bluestocking salons” formed in early to

5 Dena Goodman, The Republic of Letters ...; Elizabeth Goldsmith, Exclusive Conversations ...
mid eighteenth-century London to promote cultivation and taste through mutual conversation. Educated women of wealth such as Elizabeth Montagu, scholars such as Elizabeth Carter, and aristocratic women such as the Duchess of Portland hosted and participated in women’s conversation groups, in London and during the summer months, in their country homes. English blue-stocking salons were less rigid than French elite gatherings, in that English hostesses did not see themselves as enforcers of civility and respect for rank among participants. Bluestockings were explicit in the purpose of their associations – to replace supposedly dissipated socializing (such as card-playing or gossip) with a publicly edifying "rational" sociability. Hannah More illustrates the pride such women took in their participation in such gatherings, especially those which included prominent male writers, such as the famous dramatic author Robert Sheridan. As a woman, she wrote, “I did not care to say much in so large and learned an assembly. However, lest Sheridan should think himself victorious” in the conversation, she quoted Shakespeare and other important English dramatists.

Such literary gatherings in Paris, London and other cultural capitals of eighteenth-century Europe might appear to exemplify the public sphere not only because of their ideal of openness and reciprocity, but also because of their independence from the government. In fact, such autonomous sociability took a great many forms in eighteenth-century Europe, very few of which were overtly or even implicitly intellectual, let alone political. Such associations included urban “confraternities,” often loosely associated with a parish church and with a local guild; though in most cases, confraternity leaders exercised no religious or economic function. Such associations were merely convivial – in effect, drinking clubs – and they became the model for such non-political literary gatherings as the “Caveau (basement),” a French drinking and singing club founded by the writer Alexis Piron – or the London’s Society of Dillettanti, which combined intellectual discussions and male sociability. This group of “London gentlemen” shared an interest in voyages to Italy and collectively sponsored archeological expeditions and published the findings of such expeditions; at the same time, the group was well known to be highly “libertine,” meaning as Horace Walpole described it,


7 Quoted in Heller, 63.
“being drunk” at meetings, during which its members sat for satiric portraits of themselves. More serious-minded efforts included the "Società dei Pugni" founded by Pietro Verri in Milan in 1761, whose members, including Cesare Beccaria, read and discussed new books on economics and political theory.

What most distinguished sociability among the literate and politically engaged in eighteenth-century Europe was not opposition to any party or government but a sense of interaction across boundaries – social, religious, geographical, political. To make possible such interactions, two characteristics were necessary – adherence to a clear set of rules created by the members and a sense of civic engagement that transcended religious, national or social group loyalties. These ideals were expressed in the eighteenth century by two terms: constitution and cosmopolitan. Constitution evolved from meaning the bodily make-up of a person to the make-up of a society or government. Cosmopolitan meant having an identity not tied to one’s one particular group or even tied to one’s government – becoming, as Benjamin Franklin was described, “a citizen of the world.” These values focused on the individual’s importance as the basic element of society, rather than the other way around. Yet, we must not overemphasize the independence of individuals in the eighteenth-century public sphere from social and political elites. Especially those who engaged in scientific or literary pursuits needed support and the opportunity to reach a wider audience, and thus needed both the financial patronage and social protection that could be provided only by the prominent.

Unlike salons or academies, coffee houses and taverns were open to all entrants. A lasting image of the Enlightenment-era writer depicts him passing his days in a coffee shop or tavern, talking about any available topic. Voltaire is reported to have drunk up to 18 cups of coffee a day at the Parisian Café Procope, while Mercier wrote that in his youth, he could nurse a cup of hot chocolate all day, to enjoy a café’s warmth place and have a table for writing. (Though Mercier did complain that his sometime conversation partner, Diderot, could become so animated as to spill the chocolate all over his pages!) In Milan, the Società dei Pugni met in a coffee-shop for its discussions -- and even named its periodical Il Caffè.

However, coffee shops were relatively rare and appealed primarily to wealthy customers, due to the high price of coffee and sugar in eighteenth-century Europe. Taverns in fact provided much more regular

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8 Wahrman, Making of the Modern Self, 179.
meeting places. In London, several well-known taverns hosted the Kit Kat Club, a regular meeting of “wits and patriots” -- meaning prominent playwrights, leading Whig politicians, and journalists who supported both causes. They gathered to discuss literature and politics. While tavern-based clubs such as this might seem to exemplify the rational-critical debate of the public sphere, members sought recognition (by having a portrait painted and hung in the tavern) and a place to drink, to sing songs and to try to charm women. Enlightened opinion in the eighteenth century tended not to view taverns as socially beneficial, but rather as potentially dangerous gathering places of working men who could easily be distracted from their civic, professional and family obligations by a drink of gin.

**Academies, Elite Patronage and the Public Sphere**

A form of intellectual sociability closer to the ideal of public space, and more influential on the Enlightenment, took place in academies. In the early modern era, European monarchs and aristocrats expended a great deal on subsidizing and sanctioning writers and especially scientists. In the early 1700s, much of this patronage no longer took the form of direct grants from a patron to an individual writer but instead took place through academies. By removing the direct personal relationship of patronage and obligation between a wealthy aristocrat and a writer or scientist, academies helped create spaces that could embody the ideal of the public sphere. Academies emerged in the seventeenth century as an expression of two tendencies that would reach fruition in the age of Enlightenment – the rejection of the medieval scholastic curriculum, especially in the area of natural philosophy, and the desire of educated elites to forge social networks for civic, convivial and commercial purposes that offered individuals occasion to associate, voluntarily but formally, legally but often secretly, across socio-professional, religious and political boundaries.

The best-known academy of eighteenth-century Europe was the Royal Society of London, which despite its name enjoyed no significant royal patronage. Financing came from the members, who included not only university professors such as Isaac Newton but also many gentlemen naturalists. These members provided a good deal of the social capital that provided the legitimacy and credibility for the scientific
discoveries of men such as Newton that were discussed in its assemblies and published transactions. In return, these gentlemen gained access to a social association they considered worthy of their status – in effect, a club whose earliest meetings were secret.

**Scientific Academies**

King Louis XIII’s minister, the Cardinal Richelieu, established the French Academy in 1630 for a specific purpose -- to create a dictionary that would standardize the French language. The focus quickly shifted from the work to the members, the forty leading writers from across the kingdom, for whom the prospect of royal patronage and of literary “immortality” proved sufficiently attractive to abandon their provincial patrons (who were also potential political rivals to the king). A generation later, as natural science grew in prestige and economic importance, Louis XIV’s Superintendent of Finances, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, established other, specialized academies such as the Académie des Inscriptions (founded in 1666 for the study of History), the Académie des Sciences (also founded in 1666), and the Académie royale de la Musique (founded in 1669 as the royal opera). By the eighteenth century, the Royal Society of London and these French Academies – and their members – had become recognized across Europe, as the most prominent sites of intellectual sociability.

The French Academies provided the model for European elites, especially rulers such as Czar Peter. Peter established the “Russian Assembly” in 1708 to standardize and simplify the Russian language and the St. Petersburg Imperial Academy of Sciences in 1725 to attract prominent artists from across Europe (really meaning from France) to Petersburg. Less well-funded and less prestigious, regional and local academies, including Rome’s Academia dell’Arcadia or Vienna’s Zur Wahren Eintracht, provided participants occasion to learn of new ideas, to present and publish their own contributions, to interact with like-minded and socially desirable peers, and above all, to demonstrate and enhance their own scientific credibility and prestige – in short, to feel that they were active participants in European intellectual life.

Scientific academies performed two important functions – to publicize the work of leading researchers and to bestow legitimacy on those who produced new knowledge. These bodies performed these
functions by carrying out such tasks as judging patent disputes and determining the credibility of new scientific claims. In so doing, they provided an opportunity for scientists to achieve government honors, financial patronage and social renown. One such scientist, Isaac Newton, was named to an endowed chair at Cambridge in 1669 but since his works were published only in Latin, he became well known to his contemporaries only when named a fellow of the Royal Society in 1672. His social and political connections rather than his mathematical treatises helped him win two terms as a Member of Parliament and election as President of the Royal Society in 1703. The next year he became a knight and in the late 1710s and 1720s, he became a European cultural hero, whose reputation helped make English empirical science the leading paradigm of the Enlightenment. Netwon’s success also became a model for subsequent academic scientists whose patrons expected them to produce not only scientific discoveries but also to bring glory, and economic advantage, to their home city or country. For instance, the Bolognese chemist Marco Laurenti, appointed in 1711 to the Accademia degli Inquieti, was asked by his patrons to publish treatises that would establish a reputation for northern Italian physicians, so they would no longer study only imported “books published beyond the Alps.” In 1747, Empress Elizabeth appointed the Russian geologist Michael Lomonosov as the first President of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, to which the Russian government sought to recruit renowned scientists from western Europe. The scientist who, in the latter decades of the century, most closely approximated Newton and the Royal Society was French chemist Antoine Lavoisier, who supervised publications of the Académie royale des sciences.

Through their association with academies, leading naturalists distinguished themselves and their work from the growing popular enthusiasm for public scientific demonstrations of alchemical experiments, surgical procedures, medical treatments, and aeronautical demonstrations before an admission-paying public. Across the first two thirds of the eighteenth century, leading exponents of Enlightenment empiricism considered public demonstrations of science – such as Joseph Priestly’s widely attended public lectures demonstrating the presence of oxygen and other gases in air – an essential component of their empirical, anti-scholastic method. Other public lecturers also gained large followings for their public lectures on similar topics, though they had less than Priestly to contribute by way of new knowledge, such as the Frenchman
Jean Nollet who gave public demonstrations of his theories of the impact of electricity on the human body. The best-known scientific popularizer was Franz Mesmer, from Vienna, who founded the “magnetism” movement; adherents participated in group physical and mental healings by holding hands to pass an electrical charge through their bodies.

The leading figures of the most prominent academies were by no means social outsiders but instead well integrated into the social and political hierarchies of the day. Indeed, some historians consider the Academies, especially royally sponsored bodies, to represent an intellectual “Establishment” or “High Enlightenment.” Daniel Roche, the most thorough historian of eighteenth-century French provincial academies, demonstrated that, of 6,000 members, 57 percent were from the privileged orders. Of those elected to the Académie Française in the eighteenth century, well over half benefited from direct aristocratic patronage, a state sinecure, or a beneficed position in the Church. This comfortable situation of the intellectual elite can be contrasted with what Robert Darnton famously described as the “literary underground,” generally young men with great aspiration for intellectual achievement and recognition. Lacking financial support and legitimacy, they found themselves reduced to scratching out a mercenary living translation or editing the work of others — or, writing for hire to produce lengthy reference works, political libels, or even more humiliating, pornography.

Enlightenment Science and Colonial Society

How participants in an eighteenth-century scientific academy used the act of producing and exchanging knowledge to gain recognition of their status is evident in the case of the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue (later Haïti). Here, missionaries in the late seventeenth century initiated scientific activity in the later 1600s by collecting plant and animal samples and reporting their findings to the Royal Botanical Gardens in Paris. The superintendent of the Gardens used royal funds to send other naturalist priests, such as the bontanist Charles Plumier, to the West Indies to collect, describe and sketch plant and animal samples, then published the results, in works such as *Description of the Plants of America* (1693), which included 108 illustrations. Plumier died a few years later, but his work then appeared in two longer,
Latin treatises. All told, his contribution included over 6000 drawings and twenty-two volumes of manuscript notes.  

By mid-century, a new type of naturalist appeared in the Caribbean – the Enlightenment gentleman whose voyages and findings were supported by, and produced for, the established scientific community. The Englishman, Sir Hans Sloane, conducted research in Jamaica, and published a two-volume account, under the auspices of the Royal Society of London, and this work contributed to his scientific reputation so much that he was later elected president of the Society. An Austrian baron, Nicolas Joseph de Jacquin, traveled the Antilles on the sponsorship of Empress Maria-Theresa and reported on his research in two books on American plants, which led to his subsequent appointment as a Professor of Botany at the University of Vienna. The Swede Olof Swartz spent two years in the West Indies, which provided sufficient material for him to publish four books on plant life over the course of his scientific career.  

Unlike these travelers, colonists who took an intellectual interest in the natural life of Saint-Domingue and other Caribbean colonies, lacked connections to European universities and academies. In 1784, perhaps encouraged by coverage in the French press of popular scientific trends such as ballooning and Mesmerism, colonists who had engaged in collection of plant and animal samples, in astronomical observations and in amateur cartography, became eager to participate in the intellectual sociability they had read about and to have their work recognized by established scientists on the continent. Led by a colonial physician and nobleman, Count Chastenet de Puységur, a group of local gentlemen scientists – who had already become associates in a Masonic lodge -- established their own learned and civic society, the Cercle des Philadelphes in August 1784. In addition to botanical discussions, the members also presented papers and published pamphlets on issues of concern to the colony, such as French trade policies and the American revolution. In August 1789, the Cercle received official recognition from the French government in the form of royal Letters Patent, and became the Royal Society of Science and Arts in Cap François. Before it would be shut down in 1792 (when academies, and all bodies carrying the name royal, were shuttered across France), the Society’s membership grew to include 163 men, including honorary members on the mainland or other

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French colonies. Their ability to create their own intellectual sociability demonstrated, as one wrote in a local paper, that “The Colony is capable of something more than making money and growing sugar.”

**Secondary and Higher Education: Collèges and Universities**

The public sociability discussed above took place through direct interaction which made possible varying degrees of reciprocal (if not necessarily egalitarian) discussion. Such interaction differed from more established intellectual activity of early modern Europe, in formal institutions of secondary and higher education. Secondary schooling remained highly unsystematic, but the eighteenth century did witness the expansion of what amounted to preparatory academies -- known in England as public schools (meaning they were run independently of the Church, not that they were run by the state), in France and Spain as collèges, and as gymnasium in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands.

France had about 350 such institutions, each of which taught on average fewer than 200 students at any one time, enrolling an estimated total of 50,000 students annually -- about 2% of the male, teenage population. Most were located in cites of at least 5000 inhabitants, and most students came from the local commercial, professional and artisanal elites who could afford to pay tuition, room and board. An estimated 3000 yearly, however, benefited from scholarships granted by religious orders, confraternities, towns, or royal governments. For instance, the writer Jean-François Marmontel, long before his election to the Académie Française, drew the attention of a local priest in his rural of hometown of Bort-les-Orgues and obtained a scholarship to attend the collège in Clermont. Most such schools which were funded and staffed by religious orders; in France, as elsewhere in Catholic Europe, a large proportion of the secondary teaching faculty were Jesuits until that order was expelled from France, Spain, Portugal and Rome in the 1760s.

Most colleges were privately endowed, and a few were supported by city governments. Collèges and gymnasia provided a classical education with a heavy emphasis on Greek, Latin and the classics. The curriculum emphasized rhetoric and grammar, largely ignoring any systematic study of mathematics or philosophy or any empirical study of history or the science; nevertheless, the combination of linguistic skills

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10 G. Lerond quoted by McClellan, 189.
and social contacts made such schools important points of entry into the elite, offering a rare opportunity for social advancement in the Old Regime. A more practical education, without the classical rhetoric but including modern languages and mathematics, could be had at a small number of private schools, such as the appropriately named *Realschulen*, the first of which was established at Halle, Saxony in 1738 to teach “useful knowledge.” Generally, such private schools catered to provincial merchant families and religious minorities, such as English Dissenters and Lutherans or Calvinists in Hapsburg lands. Private schools were also the only establishments to teach girls, besides Catholic convents. Several kings financed a handful of elite schools directly, to train civil administrators or military officers.

Universities, by contrast, did not expand but rather stagnated in the eighteenth century, after dynamic expansion in enrollment during the Renaissance. Moreover, universities remained autonomous corporate entities, depending almost entirely on the national churches for oversight and funding. Most universities had four divisions: theology, philosophy and letters, medicine, and law. In the eighteenth century, law became as attractive to students as theology and philosophy, since law offered the greatest opportunity for social advancement – by the 1780s, approximately 3500 students at French universities were enrolled in law faculties though only about 60% of those actually took degrees (compared with 5000 in philosophy and 4000 in theology). Among those not enrolling in universities were sons of military nobles, especially in Prussia and France, who generally opted for “riding academies” to learn horsemanship and shooting.

University instruction continued to be based on a medieval curriculum of scholasticism, which was thought to synthesize Aristotelian philosophy and Holy Scripture. This curriculum, in effect, functioned to reproduce a very limited body of knowledge through faculty lectures (literally readings) of a small canon of texts, considered “authorities,” which students transcribed, without commentary or discussion. To prepare for exams, students prepared to respond to very precise questions, designed to test the skills of logical inference and direct quotation from these same “authorities,” rather than analysis or interpretations. These oral examinations were known as “disputations” -- somewhat misleadingly, since very little open argument was allowed. The Austrian Josef von Sonnenfels, a professor who promoted the new, applied science of public administration, effectively described universities across Europe when he complained that the teaching of
“philosophy was about 100 years behind the times [while] history, natural sciences which are supposed to make Enlightenment general and combat prejudice, were neglected.”

Some attempts at reform of curriculum and teaching were implemented, such as at the University of Vienna, and in France through the creation of specialized institutes in road-building, mining and military engineering. At Strausbourg, a Bavarian-born, Swiss-educated diplomat, Jean Daniel Schöpflin, established in 1694 a Lutheran university that specialized in training young nobles to serve as diplomats, through the study of modern history, languages, and “cameral science,” or government. At the University of Halle, prominent rationalist philosophers such as Christian Wolf updated the teaching of philosophy and helped produce a steady flow of highly trained, progressive civil servants and clergy. In 1734, the newly founded university at Göttingen, received a large endowment from the ruling family of Hanover (which had become the ruling dynasty in Britain) and developed a new method of teaching classical texts, which emphasized critical reading of texts rather than mere memorization and repetition.

Among more traditional universities, the venerable faculties at Oxford and Cambridge saw their reputations sink after Newton. Oxford particularly suffered from its close association with the Tory party and with the conservative theological reaction against deism. Adam Smith, a professor of philosophy at the smaller but more intellectually dynamic university of Glasgow, described Oxford and Cambridge as “sanctuaries in which exploded systems and obsolete prejudices found shelter …after they had been hunted out of every other corner of the world.” One reason for this torpor was the requirement that all faculty and students adhere to the Church of England and its doctrines. Another obstacle to change lay in the two-tiered admission system which allowed wealthy students to enroll, earn a degree but not have to take classes. Such students worked primarily on their drinking, gambling, and trouble-making, while hiring students of modest means to cook, serve and clean for them.

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The disciplines of medicine and law illustrate that education was by no means synonymous with Enlightenment or reform in the eighteenth century. In both the training for and the comportment expected of men in these professions, the emphasis was on conformity to norms of gentility rather than on specialized knowledge. William Blackston’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765 – 1769) did become the standard textbook on English law, though English law students did not continue at university beyond a general education but rather “read law” with one of the 350 barristers of the Inns of Court. Barristers represented the better educated, more prestigious, and better remunerated element of the legal profession; barristers alone could appear in court and plead cases, and their reputations depended on their eloquence and erudition. Attorneys were not university educated nor did they read law; they were trained through apprenticeships as legal clerks, just like artisans. Over the course of the eighteenth century, English attorneys sought to raise their social standing and to downplay their reputation as hired hands, forming in 1739 the Society of Gentlemen Practitioners to promote higher standards of training and professional conduct.

In France and much of continental Europe, all lawyers had to receive a university law degree – for which the teaching was much like the rest of university education, involving learning by rote in Latin to prepare for a single exam at the end of the program. To receive a law degree, students had to pursue two years of general studies and one additional year of specialized coursework. The degree would be sufficient qualification to work as an attorney and take on clients, but to be accepted as a barrister (and thus qualify to argue in court) required another year or two of practical training. A large number of French lawyers, whether attorneys or barristers, did not earn their living by representing clients but gained admission to the bar to achieve recognition as a learned gentlemen. The profession, consequently, remained highly traditional and hierarchical, with an oligarchy of well-established families dominating the local bar in most cities. Though the significant shake-up of the French legal world occasioned by the government’s reconstitution of the courts in 1771, as well as the innovative practice of printing legal briefs to appeal to public opinion, provided younger and ambitious barristers, previously on the margins, to gain prominence.

While some aspects of the eighteenth-century legal profession remain to us today, the training and
work of physicians bears scarce resemblance to the modern medical profession. Like the legal profession, medicine remained stratified, dominated by physicians who had to have a university degree in medicine and practical experience before being admitted to the Royal College of Physicians (in England, similar bodies existed in other countries) and thus being legally able to treat patients and receive payment. Almost all physicians in eighteenth-century England practiced in London, leaving the cities and villages of the countryside to surgeons. Surgeons enjoyed an inferior status to physicians, still being associated with barbers, the two trades sharing a single guild, until a separate surgeons’ guild was established in 1745, though surgeons did not gain their own Royal College until 1800. Surgeons continued in the eighteenth century to be trained through apprenticeship rather than university education, though after 1745, this training focused more directly on internal human anatomy rather than blade sharpening. In France, surgeons achieved greater prominence in the eighteenth century due to the better training offered by the government to military surgeons, who went on to establish a network of hospitals, where they used innovations developed on the battlefield to fight infections such as gangrene, greatly increasing the chances for surgical success.

Most people, however, received their treatment from neither physicians nor surgeons but from apothecaries or pharmacists. These tradesmen for the most part lacked either the medical expertise to diagnose maladies or sufficient knowledge of chemistry to understand the recipes they followed in preparing remedies. Although great advances in anatomical and biochemical knowledge were made in the eighteenth century, pharmacy remained a traditional craft. Most of the competition came not from new scientific discoveries leading to new medicines, but from so-called “empirics” who claimed to have discovered, through trial and error, new and more effective remedies for all sorts of maladies. Using newspapers to advertise their elixirs or traveling from town to town to hawk their wares in open-air street markets, such quacks were in effect the lowest, but commonest, level of health care providers, rooted in the popular culture of ordinary people and far from the laboratories, surgical theaters, scientific academies and learned journals of the Enlightenment.
Freemasonry: Where Civil Society and Corporatism meet

One important example of a more accessible form of association, not supported by a government, was the Freemason movement. Long before Masonry became one of eighteenth-century Europe’s foremost legends, it emerged as the most widespread form of voluntary association. Although the secrecy of its membership exclude it from being considered strictly speaking as an instance of the public sphere, some historians have argued that the democratic sociability of its lodges provided a crucial “underpinning …for the democratic forms of government that evolved …in western Europe from the eighteenth century on.” At the least, Freemasonry offered for many eighteenth-century Europeans an initiation into a new form of sociability that mitigated pre-existing social hierarchies and cultural differences.

Masonic ideals have long been a subject of dispute, even of polemic. Legends grew up around masonry in the later eighteenth century, especially during and just after the French Revolution, which reactionaries blamed on a Masonic conspiracy. Its secrecy and the associated legends aside, Masonry’s historical significance arises from several essential characteristics – its ideals, its composition and the interaction of its members. Historical research based on Masonic archives has shown the most important Masonic ideals were core Enlightenment values of rationalism, cosmopolitanism and tolerance. Within Masonic culture, merit outweighed birth as the foundation for social and political hierarchy. Freemasons generally shared an interest in the intellectual currents of humanism and the Enlightenment. As the eighteenth-century progressed, Masons increasingly emphasized their commitment to “reason,” to “social harmony” or “fraternity,” and to improving society. While critics interpreted this rhetoric to imply atheism, mysticism and radical political activity, most of its members considered it just the opposite – a venue in which to demonstrate the self-restrained and civil comportment characteristic of a gentleman. The high representation of “men of letters” and academy members (one historian estimates 10% of the writers in eighteenth-century France were masons) made Masonic lodges, more so than salons, the home base of the Enlightenment.

These ideals may help explain its rapid spread across Europe in the eighteenth century. The Masonic

12 Margaret Jacob, Living the Enlightenment (1991) 5.
movement emerged in Scotland, when what had been an artisanal guild of stonemasons evolved into an association of gentlemen, largely if not completely devoid of handicraft workers. The movement spread to England, where it became formalized with the establishment of the Grand Lodge of London in 1717. Several years later, in 1723, an organizational charter, known as the *Constitutions*, was published and became effectively the founding text of Freemasonry. The same publication also helped establish the Masonic legend, with a preface that suggested the descent of the masons from medieval England, creating a mythic history that emphasized loyalty to the order, and civility among members. In 1738, an anonymous pamphlet reproduced the inaccurate claim that the Masons had been founded by Oliver Cromwell during the English Civil War. Although specious, this legend reinforced the widespread association of Masonry with political dissidence and heightened fear of Masons as a destabilizing movement.

From London, lodges spread rapidly across Europe to Rotterdam and other cities in the Netherlands; to Paris; to Spain and Italy; and on to central European capitals such as Berlin, Dresden, Vienna, Prague; to northern Europe; and as far east as St. Petersburg. Historians estimate that by mid-century, this network of lodges had initiated over 400,000 masons, including an estimated 10,000 members of the Parisian lodges. Masonic lodges included both aristocrats and gentlemen – that is, nobles and non-nobles – on an equal basis, and the movement drew almost entirely from the literate and well off; steep dues amounted to a property requirement for membership. For instance, dues to the British lodges cost an amount that only about one in five could afford to pay. The Parisian lodge demanded an entrance fee of 24 *livres*, equivalent to a full week’s pay for a skilled worker. Some lodges welcomed women as full members, although women were formally banned from French masonry after 1740. In practice, although Masons spoke of all brothers (and in some cases, sisters) as equal, the lodges were not necessarily democratic or egalitarian. Lodges tended to reproduce the social hierarchy in constituting their leadership, especially in the national leadership of the Grand Lodges in the capitals, almost entirely from the privileged orders.

Participants in Masonic rituals, often accused of mysticism or outright heresy, acted in what they considered a tradition inherited from the Renaissance of humanist-inspired civic engagement. After 1730s, Masons associated their movement with secular, rational values of the Enlightenment, though outsiders
accused them of “philosophical free-thinking” (meaning atheism), immorality (including charges of sodomy and other sexual experimentation), and international conspiracy. This tendentious association of Masonry with a fearful view of Enlightenment rationalism and cosmopolitanism would be reinforced by orders of suppression, first in the Netherlands (1735), then (following a Papal condemnation in 1738), in France and other Catholic lands. This suppression, in turn, drove freemasonry underground and reinforced an emphasis on secrecy and on distinction between Masons and hostile outside world. Some have interpreted this secrecy as evidence that Masons were considered a politically dissident movement, which required secrecy and ideological purity among its members. Others have interpreted the secrecy merely as part of the appeal to potential members, who could feel that they belonged to a special social group that set them apart from their neighbors, their co-workers, or the next fellow in the church pew.

Members joined largely out of a desire to associate with those they considered their peers or their betters, and were without any easily identified common professional or religious interests. Available evidence reveals a membership that drew from across the better-off segment of society, from small retailers to wholesale merchants to landowning and office-holding aristocrats. Some could be described as “significantly aristocratic,” such as the Brussels lodge whose membership in 1780 was one-third noble. Based on police surveillance of the Paris Grand Lodge, we know that Masons lived in many different parts of the city and came from many different occupations. Consistent with Enlightenment ideals and their social diversity, Masons attached great importance to the rules structure they imposed on their own interactions, which fostered an ethos of self-government. Historians have debated whether Masonry ought to be considered, as its members believed, “a school for virtue,” where “free men” learned how to live free from tyranny, or whether its rhetorical emphasis on the movement’s desire “to compel men to be happy” made it a source of radical utopianism that would infect the French Revolution. But there is no doubt that the experience of belonging to a Masonic lodge offered “middling men of considerable literacy and sophistication” a rare opportunity in eighteenth-century Europe “define themselves as adherents of a constitution and laws.”

13 Jacob, 105.
Public Theater and Theater Publics

Probably the most common meaning of “public” in the eighteenth century was the audience for a play or an opera. “Public” theater referred to commercial theaters in capital cities, which emerged in the 1700s between the traditionally exclusive court theater which served an enclosed elite and the burlesque venues of the boulevards oriented towards a more popular, largely non-literate audience. Spanish and English venues had achieved this synthesis since the seventeenth century, notably in Madrid’s Coliseo and London’s famous Globe. In the eighteenth-century, London’s major theaters of Covent Garden and Drury Lane operated under commercial managers and were supported primarily by box-office revenues. Vienna’s Burgtheater and eighteenth-century Europe’s most famous theater, the Comédie Française, more directly embodied the ideal of the public sphere. These theaters received heavy subsidies from the crown and the patronage of aristocratic elites but operated independently, and their managers sought to make the repertory accessible to a broad social range of audience. They hoped to promote in their theaters the humanistic values of the Enlightenment and, on occasion, the policies of the government that sponsored the theater. Yet playhouses were full of contention, including shouting matches among spectators about the text, the acting, or the décor, which could lead to shoving and occasional outbreaks of violence. Theater and opera audiences did not consider themselves silent onlookers but part of the performance, as individuals and groups called out what they considered to be the view of “the public.” In London, playhouses were widely feared to be rife for petty criminals and in Paris and some provincial French cities, soldiers had to be stationed regularly on stage to keep order. Indeed, across eighteenth century Europe, crowd control in playhouses became an increasingly evident pre-occupation of authorities, illustrating how dynamic a form of public space theaters were.

Public theaters drew from all levels of society, due in part to an explosion in theater attendance. Driven by patronage and commercial demand, most countries in western and northern Europe saw a wave of construction of theaters with greatly increased seating (and standing) capacities, and the emergence of fixed companies. In the seventeenth century, most troupes remained itinerant, traveling great distances to perform seasonally in fair grounds or in converted structures -- or were retained by court patrons for whose invitation to perform on a private stage they waited. In the eighteenth century, professional companies performed new
works as well as repertories of well-known works, on permanent stages, on a nearly daily basis. London’s
Drury Lane theater expanded in 1762 from a capacity of 1000 spectators to over 2300; a second renovation in
1792 enabled more than 3600 people to view a show. In Paris, by the 1770s, the four official theaters as well
as multiple, lesser venues could welcome over 20,000 spectators – over 1% of the entire city population – on
any given night.

Court theaters thrived, thanks to the patronage of wealthy rulers, such as Sweden’s Drottninghom
theater, at a royal residence just outside of Stockholm, or the National Theater in German-speaking
Hamburg. Without state subsidies, many theaters, including the Hamburg National Theater and the operas of
London and Paris, could not support themselves with commercial revenues alone. Even so, eighteenth-
century royal and aristocratic patrons sought to distance themselves from a direct personal association with
the theater, by entrusting the management of the theater building, the troupe, and the repertory, to
entrepreneurs, impresarios, dramaturges or prominent playwrights. Only in France did the actors themselves
manage their theater, the Comédie Française, and paradoxically, this heavily subsidized court theater also
became among the most commercially oriented in Europe. Capital cities, such as London (at the Vaux Hall)
and Paris (at the Palais Royal), saw expansion not only in official theaters, but in commercial playhouses
oriented to a more popular audience. These theaters drew on alternative traditions such improvisational
comic scenarios known as *lazzi*, comic opera (the equivalent of today’s musicals), and pantomime. On the
ev of the Revolution, such theaters in Paris, known as “boulevard” theaters, drew up to 1300 spectators
nightly to see mixed-genre works with musical accompaniment (known as “vaudevilles” or “melo-dramas”) or satires. These venues drew more attendance than the official theaters.

Eighteenth century commercial theater audiences were highly heterogeneous. Those possessing great
wealth, status or high office rented box-seats and often attended on a daily basis to display their prominence
publicly. Other regular attendees included prostitutes, pick-pockets and sellers of fruit and drink who
purchased inexpensive admissions to seats in the upper balconies. Those who attended only to see a
particular play or a prominent actor perform a particular role were generally well-off commoners from the
professions or commerce, as well as other writers; such spectators generally purchased individual seats in the
middle section of the theater. This elastic audience could determine the commercial success or failure of a new work, with its judgement highly influenced by commentaries in the periodical press. Just in front of the stage, in full view of the rest of the house, was the standing-room only “pit,” filled by skilled artisans, students and by allies or foes of the author, who might be recruited into a cabale or claque to cheer or hiss in an organized fashion. The “pit” was far from plebeian, with admission costing the equivalent of a skilled worker’s daily wage. Nevertheless, the pit audience became notorious for interaction with the players, either shouting out lines or, on occasion, shouting down performances entirely. This unrest led to fights and, in Paris, to the presence of armed troops in the theater, who nevertheless could not prevent occasional riots.

Eighteenth-century writers and actors debated whether such hurly-burly should be considered mob action or an expression of public opinion – and whether authors should either encourage or discourage such unrest in the audience. The prominent English actor Colley Cibber considering catcalls from the crowd to be an “insult” that had to be endured in exchange for the commercial revenues of ticket sales. Likewise, several leading French writers of the era, notably Voltaire and his protégé Jean-François Marmontel, campaigned for the elimination of standing-room only seating in the pit, so the audience would be freed from the jostling and could react more intellectually. These writers generally favored a classicist style of theater, which they believed would be most appreciated by a well-off, well-educated audience that would react tranquilly, so they favored a seating arrangement that would socially stratify the audience to prevent an unruly crowd from influencing others’ reaction to the work. By contrast, writers who shared Rousseau’s desire for participatory spectacles rather than didactic plays, advocated more emotionally charged, naturalistic plays that would attract a socially broader audience. These writers, including the innovative French dramatists Diderot and Louis Sébastien-Mercier and many leading German writers such as Gotthold Lessing, favored a standing audience that react together and share a common response to the play. These writers viewed crowd interaction with the actors onstage as a form of debate which was much more socially inclusive than the salon or literary academy. At the same time, these writers generally opposed the presence of women in the audience, because they would distract theater-goers and prevent the crowd from forging a common emotional response.
Verse tragedies that conformed to “classical” dramaturgical standards remained highly important across at least the first two-thirds of the century. These classical standards, of which Voltaire became the leading exponent in his highly successful tragedies, promoted theater written for an audience presumed to have an advanced understanding of the theories of playwriting inherited from the ancients, as updated in the seventeenth century by the French Academy. Such works followed a clear model of form (5-act structure), language (verse, not prose), characterization (mythical rather than realistic) and theme (an emphasis on the ancient ideals of pity and fear, for tragedy, and moral edification for comedy). However, the more significant innovation of the eighteenth century came from writers who opposed this “classical” conception and expressed instead which might be considered a “national” conception of theater. Such dramatists considered their public to be much more socially mixed and therefore more in need of a unifying, emotional experience achieved by identifying with the characters and action. They hoped theater-goers would demonstrate this emotional experience by crying. Writers seeking such an effect, including French writers such as Diderot and Mercier and by German playwrights such as Lessing, drew from the popular Restoration-era English genre known as “city comedy” or “domestic tragedy” as a model for what became known in the 1750s as the “middle-class tragedy” (“drame bourgeois” or “bürgerliches Trauerspiel”). Advocates of this so-called third genre wanted their work to be neither comic nor tragic, but “serious.” To achieve this effect, they presented characters the audience could easily recognize, such as ordinary men and women from trades or professions, experiencing events and conflicts drawn from every day life, such as family issues and personal ethical dilemmas. These characters spoke prose dialogue in their native language (an especially important development in central Europe, where French plays had predominated until eliminated from Vienna’s Burgtheater in 1777) and in a natural conversational style, rather than the “dead language” of verse poetry. Frequently, such plays told stories based on specific moments in national history or contemporary events, rather than abstract, universal events drawn from myths. Authors of plays depicting well-known military or political leaders as accessible, psychologically complex characters wanted to show to the nation, through the “magical lantern” of theater, how their ancestors’ virtue and self-sacrifice had contributed to their common
destiny. Pierre Buirette de Belloy, writing in the aftermath of France’s defeat in the Seven Years War, retold in *The Siege of Calais* (1765) the heroic sacrifice of the civic leaders of the French port city of Calais; these “citizens” had surrendered themselves to the English during the Hundred Years’ War in exchange for the lifting of the siege that threatened the entire city. Belloy’s play benefited from both royal patronage and achieved huge commercial success. Another such work, Diderot’s *Family Man* (1761), demonstrated the virtue of sacrificing personal gain to win the affection of one’s children.

Another genre that became widely adapted in the eighteenth century and generated great audience interest, among both elites and ordinary people, was the Italian improvisational genre of *commedia dell’arte*. This style featured a small troupe of performers playing well-known stock characters, each easily identifiable to the audience by a distinct costume. Comic stories enacted from easily understood situations openly mocked the wealthy, the libidinous and the immoral while also recognizing the appetites, passions and instincts of ordinary people. *Dell’arte* scenarios addressed such broadly recognizable themes as the constant search for food among the poor, the desire of parents to protect the innocence and virtue of their children, the limitless sexual appetites of young male desire, and the ridiculous impracticality of well-educated elites. Well established in the culture of ordinary people during early modern period by itinerant commercial troupes at fairgrounds or town market squares, and by puppet shows such as the English “Punch and Judy,” this genre became in the eighteenth century synthesized with elite comic theater into what became known as “Italian comedy.” Its leading authors, such as Luigi Riccoboni and the French writer Marivaux, achieved great commercial and critical success by merging ordinary people’s taste and elite forms -- a combination that well characterized eighteenth-century public culture.

*Musical wars and popular voices in public debate*

The difference between public debate in print and in person was striking. In pamphlets and the press, advocates of one or another approach to playwriting, composing or acting disputed over the public opinion of a given work of theater or music. For instance, the so-called “quarrel of *bouffons*” from 1752 to 1754 brought a torrent of pamphlets pitting advocates of traditional French opera (oriented toward elite audiences, in whom
classical “lyric tragedies” were thought to inspire noble emotions) against advocates of the supposedly more modern, lighter Italian works (which were thought to have broader social appeal, and could bring together a heterogeneous audience towards a common morality.) The dispute had both intellectual and political overtones, pitting Rousseau and advocates of more emotive, sentimental art, including the Queen (and thus her entourage at court, which favored domestic reforms and closer ties for France with the Austrian Empire) against defenders of classical French music. Many leading Philosophes allied with the Royal Academy of Music and its principal patron, King Louis XV (and his mistress, Madame de Pompadour) and their entourage at court, who favored more traditional domestic policies and continued foreign alliance with Prussia. The dispute produced fissures within the political, intellectual and literary world, by bringing to the surface divisions within the ideals of the Enlightenment. Defenders of classical “French” music generally perceived the performing arts, and culture generally, as oriented towards a “learned public” composed of elites formally educated in high culture, and already exposed to, if not actively supporting, new Enlightenment ideas of rationalism and empiricism. Their opponents, among defenders of light opera, emphasized the appeal to a broader, “general public” whose tastes had been formed by popular entertainment and whose responses to music would be less theoretical but more emotionally immediate -- and thus an authentic expression of the morality of the people. In the 1770s, amidst other intense pamphlet debates in France, musical war once again erupted between advocates of the Neopolitan composer Niccolo Piccinni and those favoring the German Christope Gluck. Champions of Gluck’s “reforms” praised his composition of music to suit the lyrics and the plot, which they argued could better hold the attention of the entire audience. Defenders of Piccinni favored his emphasis on the structure and movement of the music itself – which required a more extensive musical education to appreciate.

**Popular Culture**

A great many Europeans in the eighteenth century lived largely outside the world of print and learned about the world instead through oral culture – stories, songs, religious ceremonies (about which more in the next chapter) and village festivals. This collective culture of ordinary people, though, was no less public in
that it welcomed all comers on a generally equal basis and forged consensus. Still, events such as Carnival -- a collective binge in food, drink, costume and ritual held just prior to the start of 40 days of deprivation during Lent -- contributed to a common morality. During Carnival, as the saying went, “everything is permitted,” and social constraints, cultural taboos and ordinary hierarchies of everyday life were lifted, and people acted out “rites of reversal” that helped bring to everyone’s attention, and reinforce, those unwritten constraints. Other popular rituals focused on specific aspects of rural village life, such as a celebration upon the sowing of the field or at harvest time in the early fall. On these occasions, public feasts could last several days and provide occasion not just for eating and drinking but for social interaction, such as the occasion for young village men, freed from toils in the field, to court potential brides.

Alcohol proved a central ingredient in the sociability of ordinary people, providing both much-needed calories during the day (a workman might drink a small cognac every several hours) and a commodity, and around which to gather, in the evening. In rural hamlets, such gathering generally took place in the square, or in cold weather in someone’s cottage, though in villages or towns people gathered in taverns, especially open-air taverns located outside the town limits, where excise taxes on alcohol and food would not be collected. Traditionally, the beverages would be wine, fruit-based brandies or beer, though grain-based alcohols such as vodka and gin became increasingly evident in the eighteenth century. The “gin craze” reached such proportions in mid-eighteenth-century London that working people were drinking themselves to death on a regular basis that the government had to shut down “gin shops.” [Hogarth engraving?]

More generally, though, the availability of entertainment for a cheap price, the “commercialization of leisure,” represented one of the most important developments of eighteenth-century urban life. What had been traditionally two- or three-week fairs became permanent, open-air markets to which admission was charged for shopping, eating, drinking, viewing street theater or musical performance, and above all, gossiping. Demonstrations of scientific experiments, exotic animals, optical and mechanical devices, lantern-lit optical illusions and other inexpensive diversions drew from across the social spectrum. Another example of commercialization and standardization of leisure came in the realm of sport; physical confrontations as well as what had been loosely organized village ball games became transformed into formal, rule-bound
competitions of boxing, cricket or ice curling – games played by teams of villagers, plus an occasional paid player, employed by the owner of the field, who would charge admission. Meanwhile, so-called “blood sports” such as bear-baiting and cockfighting continued at inns or taverns – accompanied by gambling and the sale of refreshments – the turn towards professional sports, and towards a more general entertainment industry, had begun in the very shadows of the highly rational, print-oriented Enlightenment.

The Uses of Print

To many Enlightenment writers, the medium of print offered the most ideal form of public interaction. Enlightenment writers believed print would enable individuals of different social backgrounds, cultural orientations and geographic locations to debate with each other and forge a rational consensus on leading issues of the day. Indeed, Condorcet wrote of the printing press as “one of the great revolutions in the history of mankind … a means of communication with people all over the world.” Leading historians of the period have written of a “revolution in print” in the eighteenth century. But the printing press had long been established in Europe by 1700, and there were no great technological changes until the advent of the steam-powered press in the nineteenth century. Instead, the great changes of the age of Enlightenment were in print culture, in the uses of print.

Literacy, Religion and Primary Education

To consider the importance of the print medium in eighteenth-century Europe, we must ask how many people could read. Measuring literacy is very difficult, but historians have found that those who could sign their name – on a baptismal record, a marriage register or a will – were likely to have at least some reading skills. Some historians have pointed out that this measure probably understates the number of women who could read (but who were not taught to sign their name) and the number of poor men who learned to read passages of the Bible but did not have occasion to sign a legal document.

14 Condorcet, *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progress de l’esprit humain* (1791) “10th époque".
Nevertheless, by using signatures to measure literacy, we know that European literacy in the eighteenth century rose sharply, most notably in cities, in Protestant countries, and among men. In Scotland, literacy among adult men rose from 25% in the mid-seventeenth century to nearly two thirds by the 1750s; in England during the same period, the percentage of literate men doubled, from 30% to 60%, while among adult women the rate reached above 35% by the end of that time frame. In the German lands, often considered economically and culturally less developed, we find only 10% of adult males in a rural area of East Prussia could sign their name in 1750, although this figure grew to 40% by the end of the century. Moreover, in more urban German-speaking areas such as Oldenbourg, upwards of 80% of men (and in some areas over 90% of men) and from 46 to as high as 84% of women, demonstrated evidence of literacy. Skill, income and social position were important determining factors; among English and German landowners, nearly all adult males were literate (89%), but only about half of their domestic servants and fewer than a third of their peasants could read. Skilled urban artisans in England, such as metalsmiths, were among the most well paid handicraft workers in Europe, and an estimated 70% could read, over 20% higher than the rate for less skilled tradesmen in towns such as construction day-workers, and three times as high as unskilled workers such as dock workers or itinerant laborers. In Catholic France, only 29% of men and 14% of women could sign their name to parish registers in the late 1600s; by 1790, 48% of men and 27% of women did. In poorer, rural and less commercially active areas of southern France, literacy appears to have stagnated or even declined in the eighteenth century. But in France as elsewhere, city dwellers were more likely to be literate. In the French weaving center of Lyon where 37% of men and 20% of women demonstrated basic skills. In Paris, adult male literacy is estimated to have reached 80% and female literacy 40% by the Revolution – among the highest recorded rates in Europe. [chart from page 225]

While not all Protestants placed importance on each individual being able to read the Bible – Anabaptists, for instance, prohibited lay-Bible reading – and while many Catholic clergy encouraged literacy by distributing inexpensive biographies of saints, there is still a general association between eighteenth-century Protestantism and literacy. Among some Protestants, such as English Quakers and Swedish Lutherans, the entire population could sign their names and presumably could read. Pietists in Calvinist areas
of Prussia, and even in Catholic Austria, sponsored schools and distributed Bibles and devotional literature to even the least well off, an early form of universal primary education. Two Protestant strongholds, Switzerland and Scotland, were the first to establish widespread primary schools and achieve high degrees of literacy. Protestant states in the Holy Roman Empire encouraged primary education, with some, including Saxony and Prussia, mandating compulsory schooling at parish schools, though implementation appears to have been uneven.

England established no state system in the eighteenth century but primary schooling did expand, due to a combination of Church of England schools, charity schools, Sunday schools for the poor, and private, for-profit schools. Church schools were few and provided free education to children of artisans. Charity schools financed by private contributions and staffed by lay teachers, emphasized reading of the Bible, the catechism and moral parables -- designed to inculcate values of hard work, obedience and discipline in future workers. These schools taught vocational skills, including sewing for girls. To encourage poor parents, who preferred to have their children work and contribute to the family earnings than attend school, many charity schools offered classes on Sundays. The most numerous primary schools in eighteenth-century England were private, for-profit teachers – often local women – which were largely unregulated and provided limited education, though they did keep children close to home.

In Catholic Europe, primary schools were a matter handled by the local town or parish, but only those communities with at least a thousand inhabitants could maintain a school. In many cases, parents paid school masters directly. Nobles, and many elite commoners, hired tutors for their boys and sent their girls to convent schools. Only in Hapsburg Austria did a Catholic state promote education by subsidizing Jesuit schools; in 1773, following the expulsion of the Jesuits, Empress Maria Theresa issued the General School Ordinance which authorized state subsidies to support, with local contributions, a *volkschulen* (people’s school) in every community. Attendance would be compulsory; teachers would be chosen by the state (to ensure the eradication of Protestants from the teaching corps); and instruction in all parts of the Empire would be in German. The curriculum focused on Catholic religious belief, taught less through reading than through oral lessons, catechisms, plays, visual arts, and especially songs and music. The
program enjoyed limited success; a census of Austria and Bohemia in 1781 indicates that of 776,000 school-age children, 208,000 were enrolled in the schools.

A “Reading Revolution”? Some historians have suggested that in addition to a significant change in the number of people reading, the eighteenth century also brought about a change in how people read – a “reading revolution.” According to this thesis, as the eighteenth-century reading public expanded, especially among non-elite segments of society, new readers developed interests beyond simply Holy Scripture and devotional literature, to include the new genre of the novel. A similar argument, made by sociologically oriented literary scholars, suggests that the new literature, especially the novel, developed its audience among “middle-class” readers, especially women, who could escape from their confined daily lives, and reflected their moral code of diligence, self-restraint and devotion to family. Furthermore, the thesis of the reading revolution suggested that readers approached this new material differently. No longer reading “intensively,” covering the same passages repeatedly to the point of memorization, they began to read “extensively,” to get through one book and on to the next, thereby greatly expanding personal horizons and expectations.

Clearly, the number of narrative works of prose fiction – a new genre, hence the moniker the “novel” – increased an estimated seven fold from the first decade to the 1780s. Wholesale catalogs from the Leipzig book fair show novels increased from 2.6% of titles in 1740 to nearly 12% by 1800 (when 13% were religious titles). The greatest increase in novels came in France, where “romans” (meaning prose works of fiction rather than verse “romances”) more than doubled, from fewer than two hundred titles per year in the middle decades to an average of 500 per decade in the second half of the century. Moreover, some novels, such as the wildly popular sentimental novels of Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, or the equally weepy *Paul et Virginie* by Bernadin de Saint-Pierre became bestsellers, with initial runs of tens of thousands of copies and subsequently reaching hundreds of thousands through re-editions, translations, and counterfeits.

These theories, of the middle-class origins of the novel and of a reading revolution, were advanced primarily for England and the German lands, respectively. However, more recent research on reading across
western Europe has called into question the arguments for middle-class interest in novels and for a move from intensive, devotional reading to extensive reading for amusement and self-instruction. One Dutch bookseller’s records show that the vast majority of middle-class book buyers did not buy novels at all; they preferred ‘functional’ books: books related to their profession or job, church books, school books, books with practical general information, and booklets on local events. The few purchasers of the alleged bourgeois genres nearly all belonged to the social or intellectual elite. It was the same public that joined the reading societies. In fact, the so-called revolution was a very slow evolution, and the many anecdotes about ‘reading fever’ and ‘novel devouring’ even in the lower classes seem to come forth from concern about potential developments rather than from actual observations. In smaller towns of central and western Europe, studies of private book collections show a sustained interest in at least owning religious literature; in studies of two German-speaking towns, Tubingen and Laichingen, covering the final decades of the century, over 80% of private libraries were made up of devotional books. In towns in western France on the eve of the Revolution, private collections contained largely or entirely religious reading.

Nevertheless, evidence of the number of titles printed and circulated, taken from booksellers’ wholesale catalogues, suggests a marked decline in the share of the book market held by Bibles, prayer books and other religious matter. At the annual Leipzig book fair, devotional and theological titles declined from 40% at mid-century to one quarter by 1770 to one-eighth by 1800. In France, religious titles fell from half of all books legally published at the start of the century to one quarter by mid-century to one tenth by the Revolution. These percentages are even smaller if one includes the so-called “forbidden best sellers” – works published outside of the kingdom and smuggled into France or published illicitly. Historian Robert Darnton estimates that such “forbidden books” constituted half of all the titles and 20% of all copies sold in France in the latter half of the century. Such clandestine literature, referred to by eighteenth-century book dealers as “philosophical” works, were sold “under the cloak.” They included socially conscious and politically


16 Melton, 87.
oriented fiction such as Mercier’s utopian novel, *The Year 2440* (which may have been the single best selling book, other than the Bible, in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century). Other titles combined eroticism and materialist philosophy, such as “Thérèse, the Philosopher” or featured politically oriented pornography known as “libels” such as the notorious “Anecdotes” about King Louis XV’s mistress, the Countess du Barry. Outside of France, John Cleland’s *Fanny Hill* about a sometime prostitute, became a best-seller. Although some of the most widely read books were indeed serious works of Enlightenment philosophy or political theory, eighteenth-century readers were not in fact turning en masse to novels.

Indeed, a most striking discovery is that relatively few readers acquired the works that are today considered the canon of Enlightenment literature. Among the most commonly sold books were almanacs, which were printed in runs of 100,000 to 200,000 copies – in contrast to runs of 500 for many works of literature and philosophy. Short works on current affairs, especially genres that enabled authors to circumvent official censorship, such as printed legal pleadings or prefaces to plays, could become overnight sensations, on occasion selling 10,000 copies. This ephemeral literature co-existed with newspapers and periodicals, which could reach runs of up to 20,000 in exceptional cases, such as the *London Times*, or at its height *The Spectator*. But most newspapers were printed in runs of 200 to 500 that could be passed along to up to 20 readers per copy. Also widely circulated were small, inexpensive editions known as chapbooks or, in France, the “blue library” because they were printed on inexpensive, blue paper; these editions included stories (including lives of the saints as well as fables and historical tales). Such editions were sold by itinerant peddlers, especially in smaller towns of the countryside that did not have bookstores. Cheap print, including devotional literature, scandalous libels, almanacs, newspapers, counterfeit editions of popular plays, and the occasional legal, political or philosophical tract, created an information network across eighteenth-century Europe that while far from an idealized public sphere of rational-critical debate, did make possible communication of information on a far broader basis than ever before.
While very few eighteenth-century writers could support themselves financially from the sale of their works, Eighteenth-century European produced more per capita of those who considered themselves “men of letters” than any period before or since. Enlightenment-era gens de lettres distinguished as writers not so much by their autonomy from patronage but because many based their social status as writers solely on their function, rather than any connection to the state, the Church or universities. Indeed, as one commentator noted in 1761, “we live in an age in which almost everyone is afflicted with a passion to be an author….Anyone who can hold a pen writes books.” And the number of authors grew across the century; successive editions of a French literary almanac reveals nearly 1200 individuals who had published at least one book in 1757, nearly twice that number 12 years later, and by 1789, over 3000 published authors.\footnote{Darnton, “Facts of Literary Life in Eighteenth-Century France,” in Baker, ed. *Political Culture of the Old Regime* (1991).}

A long-standing version of the eighteenth century trumpets the rise of “Philosophes” as those whose independence enabled them to take intellectual positions consistent with the Enlightenment, and thus in opposition to established institutions of the Old Regime. This autonomy took several forms – financial autonomy from patrons achieved through the rise of a sizeable literary marketplace and the advent of intellectual property laws; political autonomy through close relationships with printers, who provided refuge from censorship; and moral autonomy from the church through membership in academies, salons and lodges. This interpretation of writers as independent remains crucial to the conception of the eighteenth century as the birth of the public sphere, in which writers – as Alexis de Tocqueville wrote – “took the lead in politics.” However, more recent research has shown that eighteenth-century writers were neither uniformly independent nor dissident, nor did they seek to be. Over one-third of published authors in France prior to 1789 were members of the privileged orders, and the great majority of the rest came from well-established families in such corporative professions as law, medicine or the skilled handicrafts. Moreover, those writers who did engage in “philosophical” writing – meaning works supportive of Enlightenment ideals – were much more likely to be members of an academy or hold an honorific position or paid sinecure. Thus, a new interpretation presents the “High Enlightenment” as composed of “respectable,” socially “assimilated”...
writers, who enjoyed close relationship with “les grands” -- social and political elites who served as patrons and protectors, offering material support and social recognition, rather than restricting independence.

That successful writers certainly did achieve a greater status in the eighteenth century than they had in the past is most evident in the attention paid to author’s name in the publication and promotion of works. Around mid-century, authors’ names (such as William Congrève) began to appear on playbills in London and Paris (where the comic author Pierre Caron de Beaumarchais’s name, rather than the leading actor’s, appeared on posters advertising his “Marriage of Figaro” in 1784). While many books appeared anonymously or pseudonomously, printers increasingly highlighted the name and image of a well-known author to sell books. Major figures, notably Voltaire, were nearly assured of the commercial success of any work they staged or had printed, to the point that Voltaire spent considerable time fending off counterfeit editions and parodies that falsely implied his authorship. Even minor writers by the later eighteenth century published multi-volume collected works, often featuring an engraved portrait as a frontispiece.

Literary life of the eighteenth century included many prominent women writers, who wrote much more than the novels and plays that have long been associated with female writers of the age. Among the many important intellectual contributions included breakthroughs in experimental science (such as Emilie du Châtelet’s Insitutions du Physique of 1737), anthropological commentary (such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s widely read letters from the Ottoman Court), moralistic novels (such as Fanny Burney’s Evelina of 1778) and important works of political philosophy (most notably, Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of the Rights of Women of 1792).

Some view the age of Enlightenment as a period in which women were marginalized and excluded from the public sphere. Such arguments point out that the number of titles by women writers appears to have declined across the century. While nearly 3000 authors were listed in the France littéraire directory of 1784 as having published at least one book (and that number was triple the 1757 edition of the same directory), only about 200 French authors from 1754 to 1789 appear to have been women. English literature produced a comparably small number of women authors, just under 400, between 1750 and 1789, though English statistics appear to show a steady decade-by-decade growth. One must say “appear” because we are unsure of
how many of the anonymously published works were by women. Moreover, pessimists argue that cultural expectations of female authorship may have become more restrictive, as women “disappeared” from the commercial marketplace except as novelists. At the same time, it is clear that women played central roles in literary life far beyond authorship, including organizing and hosting salons and developing social networks. They could thereby recruit, encourage and launch the careers of writers, to the point of organizing the campaigns of leading writers for election to academic posts. Such efforts represented an important part of the Enlightenment, the putting in place of the basis for rational debate – exchanges based on civility, reciprocity and regard for the merit of the idea rather than the rank, or sex, of the speaker. Women such as Madame de Tencin (who oversaw the early career of Voltaire, among many other playwrights, and guided them to prominence in the 1720s and 30s), and Madame Geoffrin were crucial gatekeepers into literary life and played a role that in future centuries would be that of agents, editors and publicists – the taste-makers of the eighteenth century.

Printing and the book trade

The foremost item on the agenda of the Enlightenment agenda, freedom of expression, suited both the ideological and practical concerns of the Philosophes. On the level of ideas, no single issue better represented their understanding of human nature as essentially rational and sociable than freedom of thought and expression; on a practical level, as advocates of substantial cultural, religious and political change – and as, in many cases, being devoted full-time to the profession of writing, editing and publishing – the Philosophes believed in the need for liberty of the press for their movement to thrive.

Still, aspiring authors, seeking to participate in Enlightenment-era literary life, faced a series of obstacles in achieving fame and fortune. First and foremost, a writer needed to find a printer willing to publish his or her work, in exchange either for a lump sum payment or for copies of the work. Printers also functioned as booksellers in most European cities, as parts of guilds such as the Stationer’s Company in England or the French Company of Printers and Booksellers (known as the Book Trade) in France. These

guilds provided economic protection for the printer, assuring a “right to copy” or copyright, for that particular title. However, such protection only extended as far as the guild’s authority – usually within a city. The result was an active market in counterfeit editions and in book smuggling, especially in what was the most common language of intellectual discussion in the eighteenth century, French. Books printed in Brussels, Liège, Geneva, or the papal enclave of Avignon were smuggled frequently to the capital to circumvent the tightly controlled book trade.

Writers generally did not, especially in the first half of the century, obtain a copyright for their own work but instead contracted with a printer, often through the graces – and subsidy – of a patron or protector, either institutional or individual. Some writers, especially in England with its more open political culture, benefited from the patronage of a political party, willing to subsidize the printing of a work that would advance that party’s goals – or attack its opponents. In England, the Whigs in 1695 allowed to expire the Licensing Act, which had granted the Stationer’s Company a monopoly on printed matter and required printers to receive prior authorization before releasing any work over 4 pages. In April 1710, the so-called “Queen Anne’s Law” gave an a great impetus to printers by restricting the “liberty of printing, reprinting or publishing …books and other writings without the consent of the authors or proprietors of such books and writings…” for a period of 21 years from the date of its original publication. (This protection that would be upheld in the landmark legal case of Donaldson v. Becket in 1774.) Upon the expiration of the term of the copyright, the work entered the “public domain,” from which anyone could reproduce and sell the work without obligation to the author or original printer. Moreover, after this law, only prohibitions on libel, sedition and obscenity remained as legal restraints on printing in Britain, though taxes on each page of printed matter being sold effectively limited the number of newspapers that could survive financially and were frequently used to suppress dissenting opinions (such as during the intense political debates of the 1770s in England and in its colonies). In the case of oral performance, such as plays, the royal system of pre-performance censorship carried out by the Master of the Revels in the Renaissance had been abandoned during the Restoration, though across the eighteenth century, the Lord Chamberlain – the highest judicial officer in the kingdom – could order licensed theater managers to cease the performance of plays judged to
be offensive to decency or public order.

In France, censorship became both more centralized and more closely tied to copyright as the century progressed. The royal censors of the Chancellery read periodicals and books submitted by printers and booksellers and granted or denied approval to publish such works. From the mid-fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, the royal government -- specifically, the office of the Lieutenant-General of Police for Paris -- took over control of book censorship from corporate and ecclesiastical authorities such as the Parlement of Paris, the Sorbonne, and the corporate syndics of Paris's Community of Printers and Booksellers (referred to colloquially as the Librairie, or Book Trade). New royal decrees in 1757 enhanced rather than reduced the power of book censorship, raising the prospect, for authors or printers of works that “tended to harm religion, morality or the government,” of the death penalty! The corps of royal censors, whose number doubled to 124 between 1740 and 1760, established a highly bureaucratic procedure for evaluating, approving, and policing the ever-growing number of new editions. Each work was reviewed, based on its genre and topic, by a specific censor, who submitted, generally within one week of receiving the manuscript, a written report to the lieutenant-general specifying whether the work could be approved and what, if any, changes might be needed before publication. This censorial approbation, which would be printed eventually in the book, enabled the Book Trade to issue the printer a privilège for that edition, so printers had an economic incentive to ensure that each book had undergone censorship.16 [Roche chart]

By the early 1760s, this process had become so comprehensive and effective that liberal-minded officials, notably, the director of the Book Trade, Chrétien Guillaume Lamoignon de Malseherbes, began to circumvent their own censors by issuing "tacit permissions" or later "simple tolerances." These permissions granted a book legal sanction to be sold without the approval of the crown. At the same time, clandestine publishing and book smuggling of French-language books from the Netherlands, Belgium, and the Papal enclave at Avignon became an alternative network through which French writers and book sellers could circulate “philosophical books…under the cloak” – that is, sell unauthorized books outside the view of police inspectors, censors, and spies.

Some forms of expression fell partially or entirely outside the French censorship system and thus
provided an occasion for Enlightenment ideas, dissident speech or merely anodyne but popularly appealing stories to circulate more freely. For instance, legal briefs, ordinarily a specialized and arcane form of writing, became in the 1770s and 80s a flourishing genre, as barristers printed their arguments from a variety of cases, ranging from suits of peasants against lords concerning leases, domestic disputes, or suits against officials of the court. These judicial memoranda sought to influence not the judge but the court of public opinion through a highly figurative style that told stories of virtuous, young women being threatened by villainous men and often saved by a benign, paternal figure in the end. Particularly well-known to the public through published legal memorandum were such cases of the 1780s as the notorious Kormann divorce, in which a young wife with ties to the royal court was accused of adultery, or the “diamond-necklace affair,” involving a conspiracy by two jewelers to dupe the Cardinal Rohan into buying an expensive diamond for the Queen. These pamphlets and would never have been allowed to circulate by the censors were they not legal briefs – not because the tracts opposed the government or the church directly, but because the morality tales they contained framed how many people thought about their society.

Theater plays, on stage and on the page, provided another venue for expression and publication at the margins of censorship. In the case of French commercial theaters, authority to oversee all aspects of the official theaters, including censorship, remained with four aristocrats, known as First Gentlemen of the Royal Bedchamber. In the years after the founding of the royal theater, known as the Comédie Française, the Chancellor, the Count de Pontchartrain, ordered the Lieutenant-General of Police, Nicolas de la Reynie, to monitor public theater performances in the capital "to prevent disorder" and to report if the actors "had occasion to make any indecent postures or to say any words ... contrary to propriety." Five years later, the Chancellor ordered la Reynie's successor, the Marquis d'Argenson, to review all new plays prior to performance to ensure their "purity." D'Argenson assigned the task of reviewing plays prior to performance to a new post, which was designated "police censor." The police censor's authority extended only to the royally sanctioned public theaters of Paris -- the Comédie Française, the Comédie Italienne, and, so long as it remained under royal control (until 1756 and after 1780), the Académie Royale de Musique, or Opéra. The growing number of public theaters in provincial cities fell under the authority of regional military
gouverneurs or municipal governments, which took little interest in formal censorship, while he "private" or "society" theaters held in aristocratic hôtels were controlled only by their proprietors and patrons. The entrepreneurial "fair" or "boulevard" theaters in Paris were not formally censored; the Lieutenant-General of Police's seventh bureau reviewed fair theater plays, but only to ensure that they did not parody or too closely copy the official theater. Moreover, the police censor’s primary concern, at least initially, was that a play might violate the French Academy's stylistic "rules" of "decorum." Thus, the first intervention by the police censor came in 1702, when d'Argenson suppressed Nicolas Boindin's Bal d'Auteuil not for attacks on the government or church but for presenting "two women cross-dressed as men."

So while state censorship in France and England proved porous, political patronage of writers and printers greatly aided the burgeoning literary sphere. In England, Whig leader Robert Walpole, who headed the British government from 1726 through 1742, spent thousands of pounds each year in support of sympathetic newspapers and writers. In turn, his opponents the Tories subsidized some of the leading literary lights of the Augustan age, including the poet Alexander Pope, the satirist Jonathan Swift and the playwright John Gay. These well-established writers nevertheless criticized as “hacks” mercenary writers who were paid by the word and emphasized speed and impact over literary quality. London’s Grub Street, a rundown location associated with prostitution, disease and squalor, housed many needy writers available to write articles or short books, and Grub Street became a metaphor for this industry of pens and presses for hire.

In France, kings and nobles rather than political parties provided support to writers, both directly and through academies. Such patronage held greater appeal to the many young, educated men who came to Paris in the second half of the century – who by the 1760s, far exceeded the available support. The government made some effort to rationalize the process in 1785 by requiring men of letters seeking support to submit formal application, but by that point many aspiring writers found themselves forced into in the Parisian equivalent of Grub Street. There, according to the historian Robert Darnton, they “seethed with resentment” about having to write gossipy and pornographic libels for money, or having to spy on other writers for the police. Darnton suggested that such future revolutionaries as Jean-Paul Marat and Jean-Pierre Brissot developed their political radicalism not through participation in the Enlightenment public sphere but in
response to their exclusion from it. These men enjoyed no protector or broker to introduce them into elite social circles, and as a result, they were denied access to memberships, honorific posts, sinecures, and sanctioned venues of publication such as royal theaters, authorized printers or transactions of scientific academies. Such a self-described “poor devil” as the aspiring poet and later revolutionary Fabre d’Eglantine could maintain his hopes of a literary career, and his self-image as a “man of letters,” only by working for hire, writing scurrilous attacks, pornographic libels or – equally looked down upon prior to 1789 – political journalism. Darnton described a Parisian “literary underground” of impoverished and frustrated pens for hire cranked out attacks on the outdated legal, political and cultural institutions of the Old Regime. Their writing provided a much more devastating critique of French social and political elites than did the *philosophes* – thereby preparing the way for the Revolution in response to their exclusion from, rather than their participation in, the High Enlightenment.  

Most writers who did publish work in their own name sold their manuscript to a printer for a lump sum. For a little known writer seeking to publish his first work, the sum might be only a few dozen pounds (or *livres*, *gilders*, or *florins*). In the commercially active literary world of England, a well-known writer or a text that was already well known, such as a script of a successful play, could reach several hundred or, in rare cases, several thousand pounds. Few French authors were paid as well, other than for commissioned articles for reference books or periodicals, such as those published by the enterprising Charles-Joseph Panckoucke. Most French printers generally had little ready cash with which to pay authors for manuscripts, and even a writer as well known as Diderot, who did manage to support himself largely by his writing and editorial work, earned only about 250 *livres* annually. Better paid were those who edited widely circulated periodicals. A commercial printer paid Elie-Catherine Fréron, a leading opponent of the Philosophes, 20,000 *livres* annually to edit the *Année Littéraire*. The royal government paid the tragedian and Académie Française member Jean-François de La Harpe 6000 *livres* annually to edit the cultural newspaper, the *Mercure de France*. The best paid writers received their money from a combination of sources including sinecures, such as the post of tutor in an aristocrat’s household; academy memberships; or government appointments as 

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Royal Historiographer or Royal Censor. The prominent translator and well-known man of letters Jean-Antoine-Baptiste Suard was among the best compensated writers of the age, although almost none of his money came from payments for his own writing. Suard earned over 20,000 livres annually as a censor for the royal theater and the royal opera, and as editor of the daily Journal de Paris.

Many have asserted that playwrights did better financially, thanks to commercial revenues from ticket sales, but only in England and only the most prominent writers could earn a respectable living from dramatic art. For having written the two most commercially successful plays of the latter half of the century, Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais enjoyed only about 10,000 livres from over 150 performances of “Barber of Séville” and “Marriage of Figaro.” This sum amounted to only a small portion of his fortune, most of which he earned from financial and commercial investments. Especially in France, where the culture of the court remained paramount in literary life, writers commonly renounced payments from a printer or theater. Such a gesture, intended to demonstrate the writer’s personal disinterest, and thus implying a motivation of service to the public, nevertheless required the writer to enjoy a sinecure or, in the case of Voltaire, personal wealth. We see the tendencies of writers to seek out patronage rather than commercial revenues in the preference of Parisian writers, from the playwright Pierre Buirette du Belloy to Diderot to Beaumarchais, each of whom accepted a royal pension, from the courts of Gustave of Sweden or Catherine of Russia, rather than seeking wealth by selling their works on the open market of London.

English authors were leaders in eighteenth-century Europe in gaining greater editorial control over their work and revenues it might generate. The English poet Alexander Pope, for his parody Rape of the Lock (1712), pioneered the technique of subscription – obtaining from a number of notable readers payment up front for their copies in exchange for having their names listed as underwriters. This arrangement enabled the writer and printer to obtain the capital necessary for a larger print run and a finer edition. The most successful uses of this business model were for serial and multi-volume works, such as the Encyclopédie.
Censorship, by state and church, did much more to mute the impact of the Enlightenment in southern, central and eastern Europe. Especially in Spain, Italy, and Portugal, the Inquisition remained a powerful obstacle to free expression, while in Austria and Prussia, the Enlightened absolutist state tried to steer new ideas towards economic and military reform and away from criticism of the state, the church or the aristocracy. Yet even in these places, repression became less arbitrary, and at least some Enlightened writers gave voice to arguments for national cultural awakening, reform of government and religious institutions, achievement of a degree of self-government and liberty, and economic progress towards greater opportunity and equality.

King Charles III of Spain (ruled 1759 – 1786) brought the Inquisition under control of the royal government to ensure that accused would be given a proper hearing and that punishments would be moderated. Under the protection of the monarchy, such reform-minded moderates, who did not challenge the Catholic Church or the social order, could still engage in such Enlightenment activities as forming economic improvement associations, known as the Amigos del Pais (Friends of Peace), in many cities to encourage innovation in agriculture, industry and commerce and to establish schools. Another group of Enlightened Spaniards published in the 1760s a periodical modeled on the English *Spectator* which satirized some nobles as idle and unproductive and some clergy as ignorant and superstitious. A second attempt at a reform-minded periodical, *El Censor*, appeared in 1781, but was forced to cease publication in 1787 when the Inquisition brought its editor to trial.

Still the Spanish Inquisition exerted an intimidating force on Spanish religious, intellectual and political life, such as in 1776 when the high-ranking royal official, Pablo Olavide, who had championed the Enlightenment-inspired reforms mentioned above, found himself tried, with the king’s consent, for heresy in his correspondence with Voltaire, in which he advocated Copernican ideas. The Inquisition forced Olavide to renounce his doctrinal “errors” and ordered his property confiscated and him to be exiled to a monastery where he was forced to undergo religious indoctrination. The damper that such repression cast on any tendency towards Enlightenment reform in Spain would contribute to Spain’s continued economic, political, diplomatic military decline through the end of the century and well into the future.
German-speaking Europe had neither an Inquisition nor a centralized system of state censorship in the eighteenth century, due to the combination of a lack of a strong centralized state and a strong traditional commitment among the clergy, both Catholic and Protestant alike, to encouraging personal intellectual and spiritual development. Moreover, some of the many sovereigns of small states in central Europe, such as the duke of Saxe-Weimar, became known as patrons of writers, including leading German Enlightenment authors Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich von Schiller, and of printers and theaters which published their works. Likewise, the capital of the largest of these sovereign states, Berlin, Prussia, became a center for periodical printing, which remained free of prior censorship, though the editors and printers of these journals knew to avoid overt discussion of political issues that might disturb their protector, Frederick II. For this reason, the great German dramatist and critic Gotthold Lessing described Prussia as he left Berlin in 1769, as “the most slavish in Europe.”

Lessing contrasted Berlin’s restrictive environment with Vienna, the capital of the Hapsburg monarchy, where the ruling dynasty had, through its support for the Catholic Reformation, had greatly restricted intellectual life and free expression in the 1600s and early 1700s. This situation had begun to change with the arrival in power of the Empress Maria Theresa, who sought to promote Enlightenment science to help her kingdom advance economically, administratively and militarily. As had the French state, she transferred censorship from the Church to a centralized state bureaucracy made up of both clerics and lawyers, who were charged to prohibit books that would offend faith, morality or the state. This centralization made censorship more systematic but also more predictable, which allowed enterprising booksellers such as J. T. Trattner of Vienna to print pirated editions of German books that had been published elsewhere, including books by Austrian writers. In 1765, a recently enobled, converted Jew, who had been appointed to the royally endowed chair of public administration at the university of Vienna, Josef von Sonnenfels (1733-1817) founded an Enlightenment periodical, again modeled on the English Spectator, known as Man Without Prejudice. For three years, this periodical operated at the edge of permissible

criticism of the state, proposing economic reforms to alleviate rural poverty, greater religious toleration, and improvement of the judicial system by abolishing torture and the death penalty. By restricting himself to no direct attacks on the Church or the government, Sonenfels helped generate an interested a legitimate, legally sanctioned outlet for writers to reach a general reading public on current affairs.

The Viennese public sphere greatly expanded when Maria Theresa’s son Joseph became Emperor in 1780 and greatly relaxed government censorship. He reduced the number of censors to six and cut the Directory of Forbidden Books from about 4500 titles to 900, retaining primarily those books considered to be outright attacks on Christianity, as well as pornography, but granting the government’s blessing to works on political and social reform, especially pamphlets that would reach a broader audience. Joseph sought to generate an atmosphere of intellectual openness, a broad public sphere, that he hoped would lead to support for his reform program, to help him overcome resistance from the conservative elements of the aristocracy and clergy. However, Joseph soon found that openness and free inquiry will not always lead to the Enlightenment he had in mind, as criticism mounted to his reforms for not going far enough – and such criticism became very worrisome as the French Enlightenment, which had been his model, gave way to political revolution in 1789. Joseph re-imposed censorship and created an enhanced police force to monitor writers, printers and booksellers in the name of keeping order. As in Spain, the turn away from free expression in the age of Enlightenment would help set the stage for a turn towards reactionary government, cultural and religious repression, and economic stasis in the nineteenth century.

Russia, too, saw both great advances in its public, intellectual life and in state repression during the eighteenth century. Tsar Peter the Great had begun the century by recognizing the lack of an indigenous scientific, literary and intellectual culture (fewer than 25 books were published in Russian annually in the early 1700s), so he had sought to transplant one. Peter and his successors founded in the next several decades a series of academies, specialized schools and universities under the auspices of the state, rather than the intellectually conservative Russian Orthodox Church, and staffed them with English, French and German doctors, engineers, naturalists, writers and artists. These experts were encouraged to publish short works on contemporary topics, to help cultivate among the Russian people “a new breed of people” who could form
collectively an informed, public opinion. To further advance intellectual development, Empress Catherine sponsored new schools and subsidized Russian writers and printers, whose output grew to about 350 books per year by 1790, as well as several periodicals that mocked the ignorance of the people in the Russian hinterlands and called for more attention to be paid to civility and etiquette, as signs of the formation of a Russian public sphere.

In 1767, Empress Catherine considered this process to be sufficiently well advanced as to publish a treatise entitled *The Instruction* calling for Enlightened reforms, and solicited proposals from across Russia on how to improve the government and the society. To weight the over 1500 petitions that were submitted, she convened that year a “Legislative Commission” of 560 delegates chosen by various groups within Russian society. However, Catherine was not pleased with the resulting suggestions, many of which called for the government to pay greater attention to rural poverty rather than urban development. Although it did not, as Catherine had hoped, set Russia on a course towards European-inspired Enlightened absolutism, commercial development and a national cultural awakening, it did represent the first step in Russian history towards, at least “national self-examination,” if not necessarily self-representation.

For Catherine, however, the exercise exhausted her tolerance for criticism, resulting in a harsher and more effective, state system of repression. She ordered the prosecution of her own legal clerk, Nikoli Novikov (1744-1818), who had been her own representative to the Legislative Commission and who had undertaken a fundraising campaign to support new schools for Moscow’s poor and had founded a printing business to publish independent-minded journals of the sort he thought the Empress wanted. Instead, he was jailed in 1789. Likewise Alexander Radischev, who traveled across the country to observe the problems of some of Russia’s rural regions, and had published a book calling for reform of serfdom, also saw himself imprisoned under harsh conditions in 1790. The repression of a nascent public sphere in Russia was perhaps the most thorough, since intellectual life there had been so thin; the resulting turn away from free debate would set back the cause of reformer in Russia and leave very little of a public sphere on which those seeking gradual change could build in the future.

So, the eighteenth century brought to Europe, especially southern, central and eastern lands such as
Italy, Spain, Austria, and Russia both the first significant steps towards both a more centralized government and a more vibrant, independent public sphere for debate. However, the combination of those two, interrelated developments resulted frequently in systematic repression by the former of the latter. Although these states began their reform efforts with a mind to fostering support among urban commercial and professional elites while diminishing the influence of privileged landowning aristocrats and clergy, those latter groups were in the longer run the beneficiaries of state crackdowns on the public sphere. When rulers found that the price of winning support of the urban public would be criticism of the slow pace of reform, and especially when they associated moderate top-down reform with the more thorough-going changes sought by the French Revolution, dynasts fell back into the arms of an increasingly reactionary clergy and aristocracy – and adopted the reactionaries association of liberal ideas, toleration and freedom of expression with a danger to the respect for order and moral authority.

Only in western and northern Europe, specifically England and the Netherlands, did a durable public sphere emerge in the eighteenth century. In France, in the face of repressive censorship, advocates of Enlightenment persevered so that public opinion would be heard, and the values of toleration, reform and free expression appeared, briefly, to thrive. However, the difficulty of overcoming such repression meant that by the 1770s and 1780s, the Philosophes found themselves divided on leading cultural and political issues of the day, so that “public opinion” could not be seen as a consensus. At the same time, while growing, and increasingly ambitious, desire to participate in the Enlightenment and to pursue new scientific inquiry and promote more thorough-going social and political reform – a desire that ran from less well off writers to thriving artisans of the cities and among prosperous peasants of the countryside – effected the same split that repression in eastern Europe brought, between intellectual elites and the broad public which they hoped to influence. While support remained and grew for new ideas and reform, much of the European population in the eighteenth century remained at a distance from the institutions of the public sphere. Despite the claims of the Philosophes about the power of reason and of print to bring about a continually growing realm of openness and publicity, they were among the first to learn that the life of the mind, and the cause of progress, remained a dangerous and often thankless one -- caught between worried and repressive governments and
The eighteenth-century public sphere provided a rich ensemble of institutions that framed the intellectual and political lives of writers in the age of Enlightenment. As writers in this age achieved greater autonomy from elite patrons, the public sphere constrained them from utopian idealism by forcing pragmatic engagements between intellectual aspirations and social and political reality. The still-nascent public sphere of the eighteenth century created new opportunities for intellectual expression, but by no means did it enable Enlightenment writers to subvert longstanding political institutions, a hierarchical social order and organized religion. Thus, anyone who has wondered how the authors of inspiring ideals of equality and liberty for all men could have also failed to extend that vision into a practical application of full political rights, elimination of poverty, abolition of slavery, or equality for women, should look not to the failures of Enlightenment ideals but to the relatively inchoate and limited public sphere of the eighteenth century. Eighteenth-century writers were willful participants in public life, where they advocated greater equality and freedom among individuals, greater rationality in matters of common concern, diminished roles for inherited wealth and political power and for leaders of organized religion, and above all an unfettered faith in the possibilities of human moral and material improvement. Their real legacy is a liberal tradition, bequeathed to subsequent intellectuals, of writing, printing, speaking, listening and above all participating in civic life – rather than the limited influence Enlightenment Philosophes exerted on their own age.