

From Louis XIV to British Global Hegemony

The Age of Louis XIV (1660 – 1715)

Personal Rule of Louis XIV

The chimera of European unity has been pursued since the Fall of Rome. Charlemagne, popes, emperors, the Hapsburg, Valois and Bourbon dynasties, Napoleon and Adolph Hitler all tried, but ultimately failed at this project. In our own time the European Union was created, in tenuous hope that a genuine European spirit would displace the nationalisms that have so plagued the continent. Today it is in economic crisis, in part because it established a monetary union without an adequate foundation of linguistic or political unity. In the seventeenth century, often called the age of religious wars, Louis XIV attempted to dominate a Europe that lacked both religious unity and religious toleration, and was thus disfigured by a series of conflicts, partly theological but largely dynastic. Following the death of Cardinal Mazarin in 1661, after fifty-four years of personal rule, Louis XIV confessed on his own death bed in 1715 that he had been too fond of war – having subjecting France and its exchequer to a series of pointless conflicts aimed at total Bourbon domination of Europe.

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) had ended the hegemony of the Hapsburg Empire, leaving Germany so devastated that she would not fully recover until the nineteenth century. This left France the leading European power – and Louis decided to make the most of it. Due to the efforts of Cardinal Mazarin, he presided over a state that was free from significant internal opposition, and possessed the greatest armies and revenues in Europe. The nobility were servile, confined to the elaborate ceremonial farce of Versailles while Louis ran the government with the assistance of the upper bourgeoisie. Thus the aristocrats and upper merchant class were amply rewarded from the proceeds wrung from the eighty percent of the population that was ruthlessly taxed to provide for their betters. They might well have thought that this was stinking system – especially as, in curious counterpoint to Versailles' aristocratic elegance, the excreta of its courtiers could be detected from miles away.

Louis was hostile to any form of heterodoxy in religion. Thus, he supported the Jesuits over the Jansenists, and suppressed the Huguenots by revoking the Edict of Nantes in 1685. He deprived Protestants of all civil rights; their

children were required to be raised as Catholics while Protestant clergy were exiled or sent to the galleys. Huguenots fled to England, the Dutch Republic and other Protestant states. Until 1688, successive efforts to build an anti-French coalition to oppose Louis' expansionist policies failed as French diplomats successfully played his enemies off against one another. However, after 1688, "France had to wage twenty-five years of grueling warfare against an international coalition which first halted Louis' expansion and then threw him on the defensive. The organizer of this anti-French coalition was one of the master politicians of the century, William of Orange <who> spent his entire life fighting Louis XIV and all that he stood for." (1/187f.)

The Challenge of William of Orange

The Glorious Revolution

The year 1660 witnessed the restoration of Charles II to the English throne. Theaters re-opened, morals were less restrained, and religious conformity was no longer so strictly enforced. The Church of England was re-established as the state religion, but Archbishop Laud no longer led an aggressive Church hierarchy. Non-conformist sects like the Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and Quakers were firmly planted in the English religious landscape. The earlier mood of theological and moral earnestness personified by Hobbes and Milton was replaced by the sophisticated and urbane skepticism of Restoration comedy and John Dryden, and by the empiricism of John Locke. The English economy prospered as never before. Although Charles II had wished to be an absolute monarch on the model of Louis XIV, he had neither the political dynamic nor, truth be told, the determination and taste for hard work that such a role would have required. He also wished to return the country to Catholicism, and had even received a subsidy from Louis to do so. However, he prudently yielded to domestic political pressures and did nothing of the sort.

During his reign, the anti-Catholic faction promulgated the hoax of a popish plot by which the Jesuits would assassinate the king, massacre English Protestants and elevate James, the king's zealously Catholic brother, to the throne. The "plot" was a fabrication of a character named Titus Oates. However, seven years later, upon Charles' death, James did ascend to the throne. Protestants were not terribly worried because he had no male heirs and his daughter, Mary was married to William of Orange (Remember William?). However, in June, 1688, the queen gave birth to a son, who, as a male, instantly became a Catholic heir to the throne. Even though there was a fantastic rumor alleging that the baby had been smuggled into the queen's bed in a warming pan, there is much greater truth in the well known nursery rhyme which describes what happened to

the newborn prince and his father during the closing months of 1688: “Rock-a-bye baby, on a tree top. When the wind blows, <the gale that blew William’s invading fleet to England> the cradle will rock. When the bow breaks, the cradle will fall, and down will come baby, cradle and all.” (1/194f.) In more prosaic terms, what happened was that Parliamentary leaders discretely invited William of Orange to bring his army to England in defense of the Protestant faith knowing full well that William and his wife Mary were the prime Protestant candidates for the English throne.

In the previous century, the House of Orange had waged a successful struggle for Dutch independence against Phillip II of Spain – a conflict given musical immortality by Verdi in his opera Don Carlos. The Dutch Republic then became the dominant commercial power in Europe until she was defeated by England in a series of commercial wars. Until her defeat, Amsterdam had reigned as the leading trading port of the continent. This was not an aristocracy, and certainly not a democracy, but a haut bourgeois oligarchy. It was also the most tolerant country in Europe in the age of Hals, Rembrandt and Vermeer.

When James fled to France in 1688, Parliament chose to interpret this as an abandonment of the throne. Declaring the throne empty, they recognized William and Mary as joint sovereigns. This was the so-called “bloodless” Glorious Revolution. It has been pointed out that it wasn’t absolutely bloodless as James did suffer a nosebleed around the time that William landed. William had now added England securely to his coalition against Louis. This is the beginning of an ongoing contest between England and France that would involve no fewer than seven distinct wars and would end only with Napoleon’s final defeat in 1815. It was a struggle for world leadership that would dominate the politics of the era culminating in the Pax Britannica of the nineteenth century.

The Nine Years War of 1688-97 was typical of its time in that it was fought largely by mercenaries who were far too expensive to be used as cannon fodder. Since pitched battles resulted in high casualty rates, such battles were generally avoided. Indeed, by 1694, Louis was paying for 400,000 soldiers – an expense that represented seventy-four per cent of his budget in a country where two successive disastrous harvests had resulted in the deaths of ten per cent of the French population. Nevertheless, all the parties kept on fighting a war that was a hopeless stalemate. During a five year pause in the fighting, William was succeeded by Queen Anne. In the War of the Spanish Succession, begun in 1702, the towering English figure of the time was the commanding general of the English forces, John Churchill, duke of Marlborough, an ancestor of Winston Churchill. He defeated the French repeatedly between 1704 and 1708, most famously at

Blenheim where he was willing to accept the deaths of a quarter of his troops to defeat a crack French army. The anti-French forces were also victorious in the Netherlands, Spain and on the Italian front and even threatened to advance on Paris. On top of all of this, France experienced a bad harvest and a general famine in 1709. Nevertheless, the war continued until 1713. By then, the grand alliance had come apart; and so there could be no single peace treaty, but a series of separate pacts resulting in a general pacification. As could have been accomplished by enlightened diplomacy before the war, all participants achieved territorial adjustments and made concessions. But the British emerged as the the eighteenth century's dominant power in both the Old and the New Worlds.

Meanwhile, in Eastern Europe, all was not peace and light. Indeed, a series of long and bloody wars were to cause the decline of Turkey, Sweden and Poland and the elevation to great power status of Austria and the Russia of Peter the Great who reigned from 1682 to 1725. Peter ascended the throne at age ten under the regency of his sister Sophia whom he overthrew to rule in his own right at the age of seventeen. He scandalized Muscovites by cavorting with western artisans and seamen in Moscow – and by dressing like them. In 1697, he traveled to Holland and England to study shipbuilding and recruit foreign workers to Russia. He returned home with scissors in hand to cut the long beards and flowing sleeves of his chief nobles. Peter was a huge and powerful man with erratic and passionate emotions – something of a wild man, in fact. Despite his role in westernizing Russia, it is hard not to see him as a savage. The traditional Kremlin guards, the streltsy, opposed his innovations so he personally attended their interrogations and torture – and even invited foreign residents in Moscow to participate in the decapitation of those streltsy found guilty of rebellion. The opposition to his policies came to include his son and heir, Alexis. When Alexis, fled to Vienna and Naples, Peter had him hunted down and brought back to Moscow for torture and interrogation; and Alexis would have been publicly executed, had he not died from forty strokes of the knout.

Art and Culture

If one wanders through any great museum of European painting, one cannot help but be struck by the tradition of old masters beginning with Giotto, running through the Italian and Northern Renaissance and culminating in the painters of the Republican Netherlands: Hals, Rembrandt and Vermeer and the landscapes of the French expatriates, Poussin and Claude Lorraine. Then one is jolted by the astonishing shallowness of the painting of the latter seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What has happened? Well, I would suggest that Versailles, and all that it stands for, is what happened.

Contemplating French culture during the personal reign of the Sun King, it is difficult to suppress a yawn. During a period when England was producing Newton's *Principia Mathematica* and Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*; France produced only the classical drama of Racine and Moliere – classical in the sense that they are only read by literature students to whom they are assigned as required reading; (When did Broadway last mount a revival? Are we eager for the film release – no doubt the hottest tickets in town?) Of course, there was also Versailles – a vast monument to official political art as state propaganda. It is filled with art – almost all of it dull. It is true that Bernini completed a marble bust of the king, but it is not one of his more ecstatic efforts. I remember that when I visited Versailles the dominant response was an oppressive exhaustion – in the gardens as well as the buildings. This is a marked contrast to the spontaneous delight one feels in the Tuilleries Gardens of Paris. It would seem that official political art is utterly boring whether that art is the socialist realism of Communist Russia or the mythological extravagance of Versailles. While we are at it, we might note that the republican propaganda art of David and Gilbert Stuart are not exactly a joy to behold either. And it isn't just in painting that this is the case. In music, the leading court composer was Jean-Baptiste Lully who conducted his musicians by beating time with a heavy staff which he banged against the floor. It is interesting that even the most fanatic exponents of early musical performance authenticity (original instruments and all that) do not encourage this “authentic” way of conducting the orchestra. They are not quite that dogmatically pure. However, at the Court, the aristocratic music lovers were quite content to listen to Lully's music punctuated with rhythmic thumps. Unfortunately, on one occasion, Lully struck his toe resulting in an abscess which became gangrenous. Lully refused to have his toe amputated and the spreading gangrene caused his death. Actually, artistic pride of place indeed passed from art to music at this time. However, this development took place far from Versailles with the invention of the pianoforte and the genius of Bach and Handel who were both born in the year 1685.

A curious development occurred in the theater. In ancient Greece, in medieval Europe, in London; the theater had always been a popular entertainment until the Puritans felt that the public was more entertained than was godly – and closed it down. With the Restoration, there were again theaters, but they catered only to the upper classes. The same was true of the Court society of Louis XIV where Moliere held sway. This is a trend that continues to the present day where “legitimate” theater is less a popular entertainment than a display of conspicuous consumption on the part of the moderately affluent members of the middle class.

Enlightenment Europe: 1715-1763

Political context

When one thinks of the sixteenth century, one thinks of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and Philip II. In the seventeenth century, the figure of Louis XIV is inescapable. However, in the eighteenth century, one thinks not of monarchs, but of public intellectuals – of Kant, Johnson, Gibbon, Swift, Pope, Hume, Franklin, Rousseau, and, above all, of Francois Marie Arouet de Voltaire. The age of monarchy ended in 1715 with the death of Louis XIV. After 1715, both England and France had kings. However, neither country was actually ruled by them, but by surrogates who administered the kingdom in their name. This period is usually viewed as “The Age of Enlightenment” – and so it was, among other things.

In 1715, Louis XIV finally died. He bequeathed a militarily and financially exhausted nation to his great-grandson who became Louis XV at the age of five under the regency of the Duc d’ Orleans. The child had been orphaned by the deaths of both his parents when he was three years old and would be torn from the nurturing care of his governess at the age of seven because the French king must not be reared by women. It is hardly surprising that he grew to be secretive and emotionally dependent on feminine support as well as lacking in the self confidence necessary to replace the man who had dominated European politics for half a century.

After the death of Orleans in 1723 and a three year regency under the Duc de Bourbon, France would be effectively ruled by the king’s old tutor, Cardinal Fleury. This was the most peaceful and prosperous part of the reign of Louis XV. Fleury stabilized the currency and, in 1738, actually managed to balance the budget. The domestic abuses of Louis XIV's rule and the disastrous financial policy of the regency were partly liquidated. However, the extravagances of Louis XV's court, the expense of warfare, and the defeat of attempts at reform would enfeeble the monarchy by the end of the reign. Aristocratic opposition would defeat all efforts to reform the inequitable tax system. Abroad, Fleury sought peace by attempting to maintain the alliance with England while pursuing reconciliation with Spain. Unfortunately, this peace policy was not to prevail.

When Fleury died in 1743, Louis assumed personal rule at the age of thirty-three. He aspired to rule in the tradition of Louis XIV, but he was no Louis XIV. He was intelligent, generous, and, at the beginning at least,

sincere in his desire to aid his people. However, he lacked other qualities essential for political rule. He was timid, cynical, bored by administrative matters, and incapable of sustained effort. The result of the King's lassitude was the emergence of court factions which sought to influence policy. Although the political role of a succession of royal mistresses has sometimes been exaggerated, it might unkindly be suggested that in assuming personal rule, Louis replaced rule by minister with rule by mistresses. Such favorites as Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry often intervened not merely to obtain gifts and positions for their friends, but also to substantively influence public policy as when Madame de Pompadour used her influence on behalf of an Austrian alliance prior to the War of the Austrian Succession. In his later years, Louis developed a penchant for young girls, keeping several at a time in a personal seraglio known as the Parc aux Cerfs ("Deer Park"). One of its inhabitants, Marie-Louise O'Murphy, was immortalized in a painting by Boucher. ([Plate A](#))

Meanwhile, in England, upon the death of Queen Ann, the crown had passed to the Hanover family. Thus, with George I, England was nominally ruled by a man who was preoccupied with German politics, disliked England, and didn't speak English. George II did speak English, but was also committed to Hanover and German politics.

However, England prospered under kings that hardly spoke English and weren't much interested in England because the country was actually governed by the realm's first Prime Minister, Robert Walpole. Walpole ran a decently corrupt but very capable government based on patronage and consensus politics. Like Fleury in France, Walpole was desirous of peace and, between them, they produced a generation of peace until their influence waned before the war parties of their respective countries. Walpole's governance would ultimately be replaced by the personal rule of the earnest, but not especially intelligent, George III whose political sagacity would cost Britain her American colonies.

Art and Music

For much of the early eighteenth century, the arts were decorative in function. Both music and the visual arts emphasized elaborate ornamentation. The artist was called upon to adorn the spacious and elegant luxury of the governing classes, and to enhance the pomp and solemnity of ceremonial observance. Art was not thought of as a means to truth or as a stepping stone to the higher life. The leading artists of the time are all relative light weights – Watteau, Boucher, Hogarth, Reynolds and Gainsborough. Boucher was the paradigmatic artist of the France of Louis XV with his unique and courageous celebration of the realm of transient pleasure and sensual beauty. Boucher celebrates a frank sensuality

([Plate B](#)), avoiding both the cutesy sentimentality of his pupil Fragonard ([Plate C](#)) and the dismay over the transitory and fragile nature of pleasure indulged in by Watteau ([Plate D](#)). By contrast, like Mozart's Don Giovanni, Boucher, at his best, joyously and unapologetically celebrates momentary, sensual loveliness inviting us to join the feast if we dare.

The visual arts seem to confirm the notion that the time was a secular age of earthly pursuits. However, in music, the Baroque was an age of giants: Vivaldi, Bach and Handel – best known for their religious works. Vivaldi was a priest, of sorts, and Bach was a church organist while Handel's *Messiah* is by far the most popular musical offering of our period. Aside from *Messiah*, the greatest works of the period are Bach's *B Minor Mass* and his *St. Matthew Passion*. While Vivaldi is best known as a pioneer in the composition of concerti and chamber music, he also devoted himself to sacred music as exemplified by his settings of the *Gloriae*. The music of the time suggests that this age was about more than enlightenment.

Literature

Unlike the personality studies that would dominate the fiction of the next century, the literature of the eighteenth century focused on generalizations concerning Deistic theology and rather conventional moralizing about sensible conduct. In Voltaire's *Candide*, a woman tells the gruesome tale of her life as a prostitute in which she was severely physically mutilated. The story is callously treated as comedy to make a theological argument against the philosophical optimism of Leibniz. Authors were exercised about the way that otherwise rational humans are buffeted by the choppy seas of the passions in their struggle to navigate their way home to port. Abbe Prevost in *Manon Lescaut* is more concerned with the dilemmas of general psychology than the unique personality of his hero. It is interesting to note that his male hero is the central character in the novel while the character of Manon will dominate the nineteenth century operatic treatments by both Massenet and Puccini. Prevost is concerned with the conflict of passion with reason and the power of passion in the age of Enlightenment. He totally accepts a world of caste privilege both morally and materially. By contrast, individual psychology and the radical challenge to social caste will dominate the nineteenth century. It is only in that century that the novel will emerge as the dominant literary form, and that the word "empathy" will enter the English language.

It is notable that we will come to care more that Elizabeth Bennett is humiliated by her mother and slighted by Mr. Darcy than we did that Robinson Crusoe had been shipwrecked. In fact, we never do learn what becomes of Friday after Crusoe returns to England – and it doesn't matter,

as he never becomes a person about whom we care. Indeed, Robinson Crusoe turns out to be less an adventure story than a prolonged eighteenth century argument about Divine special providence. What is particularly striking is that the narrator berates himself for failing to be satisfied with his lot in life, for his rash compulsion for the adventure of a life at sea, and for his lack of religious commitment. However, he sees nothing at all wrong with his attempted involvement in the slave trade – an involvement only prevented by his shipwreck.

In *History of the Pirates* (1728), Daniel Defoe writes: “I am most entertained by those actions which give me a light into the nature of man.” This is pure eighteenth century. The operative word is “man” as opposed to the unique personality of a particular individual. A similar point could be made about Swift and Richardson. It is only toward the end of our period that Oliver Goldsmith, Lawrence Stern and, of course, Rousseau will react against the dominant intellectualism of the century to begin the 'sentimental education' of European man.

Religion and Philosophy

Alexander Pope famously observed that: “Nature and nature’s laws lay hid in night. God said, ‘Let Newton be,’ and all was light.” One is tempted to marvel at an age in which even a society poet could comprehend the mathematical complexities of the Principia. Well, the poet and most of his contemporaries probably knew no more of Newton's math than I do; and what I know of it is negligible. Nonetheless, even as Newton died in 1727, his vision, along with the nascent utilitarianism of Francis Bacon, illuminated the intellectual life of the century. Newton’s demonstration of universal gravitation as the force that accounts for the motion of every mass in the universe from cannon balls to heavenly bodies revealed a universe governed by immutable natural laws that were both universal and fully comprehensible. In a sense, this marked triumph in a struggle dating at least to the time of such medieval modernists as Abelard and Aquinas to liberate human intellectual-ity from the shackles of religious faith and the authority of the ancients. Further, by firmly grounding natural philosophy in the requirement of experimental verification while building on the work of so many worthy predecessors (Copernicus, Galileo, Tycho Brahe, Kepler), Newton embodied above all a method of inquiry that the men of the eighteenth century saw as pointing the way to the discovery of universal laws of government and society that could then be applied to the enhancement of human well being.

Indeed, the French Philosophes envisioned the discovery of a comparable set of laws that would explain all of human activity. “Condorcet... foresaw a society that would enjoy a much higher standard of living, more leisure

and more equality...<and a time when> disease would be so effectively conquered by medicine that the average life span would be greatly lengthened” (2/358) – a time much like our own. Of course, Condorcet also envisioned a time when war would be given up as irrational. He could not really imagine the wholesale slaughter of the wars of the next centuries much less the Holocaust or the fact that the progress of science itself would contribute to the horror. Nevertheless, for the first time, men would come to view hardship and injustice not merely as conditions to be deplored, but as problems to be solved through the exercise of human intelligence and the advance of knowledge. For the first time in human history, men began to locate the Golden Age in the future, rather than the distant past.

I alluded to the collaborative style of scientific inquiry; and this is aptly represented by the most iconic achievement of the Enlightenment: the Encyclopedia edited by Diderot and d’Alembert with contributions from Voltaire, Rousseau and other leading thinkers of the time. It is significant that it contained multiple articles on mundane practical applications of science and technology, but no entry for Jesus Christ. Diderot had insisted that all ideas are equally open to critical evaluation. It was not merely a compilation of known human knowledge, but also an instrument of subversive propaganda and was infected with a significant dose of scientism along with its science and technology. This temptation to inject scientism into scientific discussions has continued to our own time engendering fruitless controversy in our attempts to solve problems that were already all but intractable. Still, this particular collaborative effort was one of the signal academic contributions in human history. It was controversial, unsuccessfully censored – and thus immensely popular. Indeed, the work was widely available in the very court of Louis XV that was responsible for banning it.

Well, collaboration is all well and good. However, like opera, intellectual life would be far less colorful without its prima donnas. And so we come to Voltaire and Rousseau – one, the most prominent symbol of the Enlightenment vision; the other, its passionate and rather erratic dissenter.

Voltaire was a prolific writer who was both controversial and wildly popular in his own time. In our time, he is still very famous though only one of his works is ever read. That, of course, is *Candide* – an attack on the theological position of both Rousseau and Leibniz regarding the problem of evil – their contention that “All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.” In fact, this is the only possible solution to the problem of evil in a world created by an all-knowing, all-powerful and wholly loving God – and a position that Voltaire himself embraced until he was shaken by the devastation of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. (Rousseau interpreted the

quake as God's way of teaching mankind that we shouldn't live in cities.) Voltaire does not offer an alternative solution to the problem of theodicy (for there is none); he merely advises us to "cultivate our own gardens," avoid the aridity of metaphysical speculation and focus on our proper concern: to better the condition of suffering humanity. He himself spent a lifetime criticizing the evils of French society and fighting selected instances of injustice, while emphatically not advocating the destruction of the institutions he mocked. He was in no sense a revolutionary. The program of the French Enlightenment was one of analysis and synthesis – a brutal intellectuality, freed from traditional authority, but not yet tempered by empathy and sentiment (sensibility). The smile of reason was civilized and urbane, but more than somewhat chilly.

By contrast, Rousseau was nothing if not impassioned, radical and unquestionably seminal – and not only because he fathered so many out-of-wedlock children. He can be claimed as an inspiration for spirits as diverse as Joseph Stalin and Henry David Thoreau. He complained that man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. However, this advocate of the natural man, this philosophical opponent of the cultivated society, was no more a democrat than was Voltaire. He shared with Voltaire a decided contempt for the vulgar mob and his ideal ancient society was Sparta rather than Athens. Further, in his concept of "the general will," he was so struck with the fact that a man might be ignorant of what was best for him that he felt it might be necessary to force him to act in his true interests – and thus compel him to be free. Joseph Stalin and the medieval Church would certainly have agreed.

It is easy, and even fun, to mock what one scholar has called this "world historic neurotic." However, the fact remains that his opponent, Voltaire, seemed perfectly comfortable with the gross inequities of the old regime and also inadequately appreciative of the limits of rationality and its tendency to degenerate into rationalization. He was wise enough to come to disdain metaphysical questions and to fight against flagrant instances of injustice as a matter of principle, but no one would accuse him of excessive empathy or of a quivering sensitive soul.

Rousseau asserted that his heart – the feelings – were the best guide to right conduct; that civilized society and its conventions tend to corrupt people; that conventional politeness lacks sincerity and covers all sorts of unworthy attitudes while stifling emotional spontaneity. This is, of course, true. It might even be said that this is its function – a function that can be carried much too far as it most certainly was in the eighteenth century. One only has to think of the ceremonial farce that surrounded the French monarchy at Versailles – as well as the conventions that made fashionable society so

ludicrous. When the aristocratic woman's hairdo was too tall for her coach so that she was compelled to ride with her lice-infected coiffure stuck out of its window, there was certainly a case to be made for sentiment, simplicity, and 'reasons of the heart.'

However, Rousseau himself was a poor advertisement for his position. "His immorality was notorious – he was not faithful in love, and his children were sent to a foundling asylum. He was poverty-stricken, dishonest, discontented, and, in his last years, demented ..." (3/422) Right feeling may be as important as right thinking, but feeling by itself is hardly an adequate guide to right action. In *Candide*, Voltaire famously satirizes the theological optimism of Leibniz. However, Leibniz offered a far more intriguing image of the essential human condition in his *Monadology* where he emphasized, perhaps excessively, the essential isolation of human beings from one another. Carl Jung once made the same point when he observed that we all necessarily wear social masks – "prepare a face to meet the faces that we meet.," as T.S. Eliot put it. Jung added that anyone who thinks he doesn't have a mask has so totally identified with this cover that he can no longer distinguish it from his authentic self; and that anyone who doesn't believe he needs the protection of a mask, does not grasp the nature of his fellow human beings. As Rousseau demonstrated in his own unsuccessful social life, managing to relate sincerely to another human being is by no means as simple as just spontaneously expressing oneself. It is very difficult to truly understand another human being on anything but the most superficial level. It is a tremendous challenge to understand another person's subjective reality, as opposed to the imagined feelings and thoughts that we project onto them to gratify our own subjectivity and neediness.

The Medieval Church had said that human instincts were bad (original sin) so Rousseau said that they were good. They are neither bad nor good, but morally neutral – and must be wisely managed in an adult way. Perhaps, we can, somewhat fancifully, think of Rousseau as the "inner child" of European culture – not a reliable guide to conduct, but not a voice to be stifled either; a sensitivity that must be nurtured and developed as an essential condition of any notion of a truly humane and satisfying life.

There is a reason why Durant calls one of his volumes Rousseau and Revolution – a reminder of the violence that is facilitated by the self-indulgence of a one-sided empathy. One-sided empathy is essentially self-indulgent. It makes us feel good as we right-mindedly cheer for the good guys. Pluralistic or polyphonic empathy is painful as we are confronted by the conflicting and irresolvable claims of two incompatible positions both of which elicit our sympathy. Revolutionary violence results, in part, from an empathic self indulgence which necessarily requires dehumanization of

one side of the conflict to avoid the intolerable ambiguity of the human condition.

In any event, whether we think of the Eighteenth century as represented by Newton, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, or Kant; we must recognize that its whole tenor of thought represented a challenge to the theology of previous centuries. I have always enjoyed the anecdote that is told about a luncheon at which Sir Winston and Lady Churchill entertained General Charles and Madame de Gaul. The conversation turned to what each person really desired from life, and Madame de Gaul owned the desire, above all, for a penis. There was a stunned silence broken by General de Gaul informing his wife that in England they pronounce that word “happiness.” Well, happiness, is, in some sense, a discovery of the Enlightenment – the assertion that men should be happy in this world, with a corresponding rejection of the perception of life as a “vale of tears.” This was, in part a reflection of the fact that all across Europe the middle class was continuing to grow in wealth and influence – an elevation whose values were expressed in the Enlightenment – just as those of the Florentine merchant-bankers had been captured in the humanistic revolution of the Renaissance. It is both tempting, and somewhat accurate, to see the Eighteenth century as a time of secular cosmopolitanism. However, I am struck by the extent to which atheism was very much a minority position even in the Enlightenment circles of Paris. The dominant position was Deism, a somewhat vapid theology, hard for a former Catholic like myself to take seriously. My own religious position (in the interests of full disclosure!) is a regretful atheism.

We should not forget that the era of Enlightenment France, Deism, Unitarianism and Bishop Butler’s liberal Anglicanism was also the age of Methodism and the Evangelicals and of continuing Jansenist influence in France. Voltaire may have exclaimed “Écrasez l'infâme!” as the battle cry of the militant secularist. However, Handel’s response that “I know that my redeemer liveth...that though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” is known to all. So are we to conclude that the paradigm shift of the eighteenth century was not, after all especially dramatic or profound? By no means. It just can’t be characterized, for the most part, as a shift from religiosity to secularism. Rather it was a shift in the temper of the times to embrace both secular and religious life – a rejection of pessimistic fatalism and human self-contempt. “Cromwell’s contemporaries had seen man as a tragic actor, seeking personal salvation from a jealous, punitive God, in a world where nature was a succession of portents, challenges and ordeals...damnation was the fate of the majority...This dark...world was now challenged by a new vision...of a world that was regulated by universal laws...people’s perception of God

altered <also. He was> becoming equated with Providence.” (4/265ff.)

The 18th century was not only the Age of Enlightenment, but also the age of Methodism. However, Methodism is not Calvinism – and this age witnessed the permanent marginalization of Calvinism in religious life as it found new optimism in the possibility of human progress through natural human faculties that were no longer to be despised in favor of ancient wisdom. One might say that a feel-good religion of hope (“I know that...in my flesh I shall see God.”) replaced the fearful Christianity of Calvin and medieval Christianity. Perhaps it is more than a coincidence that oppressive theology lost its appeal at the same time that monarchical absolutism lost its sway. The gloom of damnation was superseded by the optimism of the Deist, the enthusiasm of the Methodist and the confidence of the secular rationalist that life would be immensely enhanced for human beings, now conceived as deserving of and even entitled to “the pursuit of happiness.”

1763: The British Triumph

In 1743, France entered the War of the Austrian Succession on the side of Prussia, against Austria and Britain. This was an indecisive prelude to the dual between Prussia and Austria for German leadership, on the one hand; and between France and Britain for colonial mastery, on the other. Afterwards, under the influence of Madame Pompadour, Louis XV switched allegiance joining Austria against Prussia – whereupon Britain allied with Prussia. Thus, in the decisive world war, known as ‘The Seven Years War’ in Europe and as ‘The French and Indian War’ in America, where Austria and France were opposed by Prussia and Britain.

While this war was being fought, Clive was routing the French in India. The war ended in 1763 with the complete defeat of France and the humiliation of Austria. France lost most of its colonial empire in both the Far East and the Americas while Frederick the Great’s Prussia joined the ranks of the great powers. By the terms of the Treaty of Paris, Britain acquired the bulk of the French colonial empire becoming mistress of the seas and global hegemon. Britain had impressively destroyed French dominance and emerged as the world’s foremost commercial and colonial power. The British and French rivalry had not ended, but would continue throughout the following decades and through all of the revolutionary changes that would afflict both countries. However, that is a story for the next paper in this series.

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PLATES

A. [Marie-Louise O'Murphy](#), 1752, François Boucher (French, 1703–1770)
Wikipedia

B. [The Toilet of Venus](#), 1751, François Boucher, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art

C. [The Love Letter](#), Fragonard, early 1770s. Oil on canvas. 83.2 x 67 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

D. [Mezzetin](#), Watteau, 1717-19. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum
of Art