

ABSOLUTISM, CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE AGE OF REASON

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

In the 16th and 17th centuries a group of scientists emerged in Europe who looked for a greater understanding of the natural world in which they lived. Traditional thought, however, had answers to questions about the origin and shape of the cosmos and the place of the human race within it. When these beliefs were backed by the weighty authority of the Catholic Church, it was extremely difficult for new concepts to gain a foothold. It could even be dangerous to propose ideas challenging inherited traditions, as such views could be interpreted as attacks on the church.

This is not to say that the 16th and 17th centuries were void of scientific learning. The ideas of the ancient astronomer Ptolemy and those of the brilliant philosopher Aristotle formed the basis for accepted views of the natural world. Their theories were closely studied, as were those of other ancient authorities, such as Archimedes, who offered an appealing explanation of the material world. Astrology – the notion that stars and planets have a direct impact on the everyday lives of men and women – was widely believed. While astrology did not offer a comprehensive explanation of the shape of the universe, it did stimulate interest in astronomy, one of the first fields of study that created the Scientific Revolution.

The Scientific Revolution was born not in a stagnant age, but in an age of considerable intellectual activity. What sets the Scientific Revolution apart from the preceding age is not just its intense investigation of the natural world, but the fact that the explanations it produced challenged traditional sources of authority and even the very notion of authority itself.

What we call the Scientific Revolution came in segments and took place over time, as each individual built on, rejected, or refined the work of others. Later a number of philosophers tried to impose an overall structure on the new knowledge that had been acquired.

Copernicus. Though he usually credited with being the first pioneer of the new science, in many ways Nicolaus Copernicus was not a likely candidate. His understanding of astronomy was not based on observation – and approach that would gain ground only with the work of later scientists. Rather, what Copernicus knew about astronomy and the structure of the universe was theoretical, based on his education in Italy. The prevailing opinion of the day, which Copernicus learned came from the work of the second-century Alexandrian astronomer Ptolemy.

The Ptolemaic World View. Ptolemy had proposed that the earth was at center of the universe, with the sun, moon, planets and stars orbiting above the earth in crystalline spheres. This view was common enough that it found its way into one of the masterpieces of late medieval Christian literature, the 14th century *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri. Ptolemy even had a place for God and the angels at the outer reaches of the universe.

The Ptolemaic world view of the earth at the center of creation was not just theologically pleasing. It was also backed by theories of physics accepted since the time of Aristotle. According to Aristotelian physics, the earth was at the center of the universe because it was heavier than the other objects. The powerful combination of Ptolemaic cosmology, Aristotelian physics and religious dogma created a view of the universe that was very hard to argue against.

Copernicus's Universe. Copernicus did not completely reject Ptolemy's views. In fact, he accepted much of the Ptolemaic system, with the sun replacing the earth as the center of the universe. This was an attempt to solve one of the major problems with Ptolemy's universe: the motion of the planets, which did not seem to be moving in circles, as Ptolemy has proposed. Copernicus argued that placing the sun at the center, with the earth and other planets orbiting around it, would help solve this problem. Planetary orbits that seemed irregular could now be explained by the fact that the observers themselves were moving relative to both the sun and the planets.

Copernicus presented his theory in his book *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, published in 1543, the same year he died. In the long, except for having the earth orbit around the sun, Copernicus was no more accurate than Ptolemy on questions of planetary location and orbit.

Galileo. Galileo Galilei, a university professor in Padua, Italy, used a telescope, only recently invented, to look into the heavens. Telescope-aided observation allowed Galileo to see things his predecessors had simply not known about. The complexity of the universe that quickly became apparent

was in direct opposition to medieval views. Among other things, Galileo discovered that there were mountains on the moon, rings around Saturn, spots moving across the sun, and moons orbiting Jupiter.

In addition to his work on astronomy, the brilliant Galileo also made important contributions in physics. He discovered that objects fall at a predictable rate and worked out the mathematical formula to describe their acceleration. Galileo's work was an important step in the direction of the fundamental principles of modern physics: that ALL nature conforms to uniform laws that can be expressed mathematically.

Galileo and the Church. Galileo's work did not endear him to the church. It would be incorrect to suppose that the church constantly, heavily persecuted the scientists. Nevertheless, there were incidents when religious authorities saw scientific inquiry as a sufficient challenge to invite a response. In 1633, the year after he published *Dialogues on the Two Chief Systems of the World*, Galileo was condemned by the church and forced to recant his views. A public recantation, however, did not change Galileo's mind, nor did it diminish the influence of his work.

Newton. The developments discussed thus far culminated with Sir Isaac Newton, who was born in 1642, the same year Galileo died. Newton's studies ranged far and wide, including optics and laws of motion. But he is most noted for formulating the law of gravity. He published his findings in 1687 in one of the true landmark books in history, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*.

Newton argued that there was one force that attracted every object in the universe to every other object. Furthermore, this force could be calculated mathematically. With the theory that ALL nature conforms to uniform laws that can be expressed mathematically, the universe became much more comprehensible.

The Evolution of New Scientific Thinking. Much of the new understanding of the world was arrived at through what we now term the "scientific method." Though the makers of the Scientific Revolution were separated from one another by many years and miles, their work combined not only to bring to light new information about the world, but also to produce a new way of looking at the world. In the long run, this new methodology was as revolutionary as the new factual information it revealed. Never again would traditional views based on religious doctrine or the acceptance of ancient authorities go unchallenged. The scientific method and the world view it supported are fundamental to modern Western thought.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Scientific Revolution challenged the traditional notions of authority and of truth about the natural world. The next step was to apply the same skepticism and some of the methods to the study of human behavior and human society. This is one of the predominant features of the 18th century movement known as the Enlightenment. Philosophers of the age felt they lived in an enlightened free age, free of the superstition, ignorance and slavish acceptance of authority that characterized earlier eras. What the thinkers of the time could not have foreseen, they unleashed forces that would lead to some of the most chaotic times Europe had ever seen.

Objectives. Leaders of the Enlightenment were committed to the idea of progress – a future that was better than the past. This optimistic view was based in part on the scientific achievements discussed above, and in part on the conviction that human reason was capable of fully understanding human problems and offering solutions to them. More so even than the pioneers of the Scientific Revolution, the leaders of the Enlightenment wanted not to simply understand the world, but to actually create a new world governed by reason and intellect. They accepted the findings and methodology developed during the Scientific Revolution. Now they wanted take the same methods and apply them to the problems of human society.

The Ideas of the *Philosophes*. *Philosophes* is the French term generally used to identify the thinkers who led the Enlightenment. The most famous of them was Francois Marie Arouet, known commonly as Voltaire. The philosophes were not scientists, nor were they philosophers in the strict sense of the word. Rather, they were thinkers who popularized their ideas and emphasized the need for social action as the result of gaining knowledge. Like Newton, the philosophes emphasized the value of sensory experience for gaining knowledge – not just about the physical world, but about the political and social worlds as well.

Progress and Reason. The philosophes operated on the basis of a number of fundamental assumptions. The first was the belief in progress. The second was the belief that reason – the logical operation of the human intellect – was the key to solving the problems of human society, whether those problems were economic, political or social. Dedication to the principles of progress and reason led to the

assumption that humanity was perfectible. It would take education, reason, and enlightened guidance to accomplish this goal, but it was attainable.

Liberty. The philosophes were also strong believers in liberty, which made them opponents of such practices as slavery. They also encouraged the maximum possible liberty in political and economic life. One of the most famous books produced during this period was Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776. Smith called for as little government interference as possible. He reasoned that the national well-being is simply the aggregate of the well-being of all the individuals living within that nation. Since individuals are motivated by self-interest and since they know best what is in their self-interest, government should let the mechanism of self-interest operate to the benefit of the state.

Locke. Other fundamental ideas also were propounded by the philosophes or their immediate predecessors. John Locke laid out a theory of knowledge that was of great importance in Enlightenment thought. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke compared the human mind at birth to a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*, on which ideas are inscribed through experience. The empiricism was an essential aspect of the Enlightenment.

Deism. The philosophes' concern with liberty influenced their view of God and religion as well. The new information being publicized about the natural world made the universe seem more and more mechanical. This meant that it was not necessary for God to pay constant attention to the functioning of the universe. Many Enlightenment thinkers, therefore, began to see God less as a redeemer or a father and more as a rational creator, like a great watchmaker who built the mechanism and then left it to run on its own. This sort of theology left humanity with much more responsibility for its day-to-day affairs, but it also meant that the operation of human reason was enough to discover God and his attributes. Revelation was not needed, nor was organized religion. One of the clearest statements of Deism was published by the Englishman Thomas Paine in 1794 in *Age of Reason*.

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life
I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing
justice, loving mercy and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy.
But, lest it should be supposed that I believe in many other things in addition to these, I
shall, in progress of this work, declare the things I do not believe, and my
reasons for not believing them.
I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the
Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any
church that I know of.
My own mind is my own church.

INDICTMENT OF ABSOLUTISM

John Locke. The Enlightenment attack on absolutism came from several quarters. In 1690 John Locke, an opponent of Charles II and James II, wrote his famous *Two Treatises of Government* partly to justify England's deposing of its king. Locke argued that governments had a certain obligation to those whom they governed; when governments fail to carry out their obligations (including the protection of life, liberty and property), the people are justified in replacing the government with one that will protect the people's liberty.

Montesquieu. Other writers continued to undermine the philosophical foundations of absolutist rule. The Baron de Montesquieu, in *the Spirit of the Laws* (1748), argued that there were few absolutes when it came to forms of government. Rather, a government should respond to its environment. Montesquieu called for separation of powers in the government to allow for it to respond to its environment.

Rousseau. In *The Social Contract* (1762), Jean Jacques Rousseau maintained that freedom and equality were essential for a just society. In order to promote freedom and equality, individuals must place the common good before their own personal interests. This is why individuals make laws once they organize themselves into communities. Rousseau's ideal society was self-regulating democracy, in which each individual subordinated his or her own interest to the general will and in which the general will of the community truly reflected the interests of the people who voluntarily comprised that community.

ABSOLUTISM AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

Some Definitions. The nature of any government is partly determined by the way it defines sovereignty, or the location of ultimate political power. Does it reside in the person of the ruler, in the

people, or in some combination of the two? Kings, queens, ministers, and political philosophers in the 17th and 18th centuries defined sovereignty in a variety of ways. Politically, France, Austria, Russia, and Prussia headed down the road of absolutism, while England, France and Holland became constitutional states.

THEORIES OF ABSOLUTISM

Under the modern concept of the rule of law, the powers of government are circumscribed by clear and unmistakable legal canons. By contrast 17th-and-18th-century monarchs adhered to absolutism, or the rule of will – the belief that they were sovereign and their wills alone were law. There were, however, somewhat differing rationales for absolutism.

Thomas Hobbes. Some definitions of sovereignty were concerned with the nature of man. In his most famous and controversial work, *Leviathan* (1651), the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (writing during the War of the Roses) held that it was the natural state of human beings to be at war with each other. Sovereignty, he reasoned, is located in the people but, out of self-interest and the need for peace and security, they delegate it to the state (i.e. the monarch). The understanding between the people and the monarch, then, is a contract, in return for protection the people owe the monarch their total loyalty. If they rebel, the monarch may punish them as he sees fit. Otherwise, Hobbes maintained, there could be no order, and humanity would return to its “nasty, brutish,” disorderly state of nature.

French Absolutism. Powerful as it was as a rationale for absolutism, Hobbes’s philosophy did not necessarily appeal to the rulers of his day. More attractive to most was the theory of absolutism that justified the rule of Louis XIV of France, the most powerful monarch of his age. It assumed, contrary to Hobbes, that sovereignty resided directly in the person of the monarch and that it was given by “divine right.” Responsible only to God, the monarch’s word was law. Even the church was subject to royal authority (something that could only be justified after the Reformation, but the papacy still did not embrace this).

FRENCH ABSOLUTISM

The quest for absolute power in the French monarchy was not new with Louis XIV. The immediate groundwork for what he achieved, however, was laid by Cardinal Armand Jean du Plessis Richelieu, chief minister under Louis XIII.

Richelieu. Louis’s grandfather, Henry IV, brought the monarchy several steps to absolutism before his assassination in 1610. He strengthened the bureaucracy and at the same time weakened the influence of the nobility and of the parliament. His son, Louis XIII, made his important personal contribution to absolutism by appointing Cardinal Richelieu as chief of the royal council and, later, first minister. Richelieu spent the rest of his life trying to make France the leading power in Europe and, above all, to establish the undisputed authority of the crown. He was cunning, ruthless, and masterful at both administration and intrigue. He worked particularly hard at destroying the power of the nobility, the most serious threat to absolutism. One way of doing this was to refuse to call together the Estates General – the ancient deliberative and advisory body that generally represented the nobles. The nobles’ influence in the provinces was sabotaged when he increased the power of royal *intendants* (administrative officials) over France’s various administrative districts. Nevertheless, Richelieu was also shrewd enough to try to co-opt the nobility by giving them various military and diplomatic positions.

Richelieu did not hesitate to execute anyone caught in a conspiracy against the government, nor was he averse to taking action against Protestants if he thought it was in the interest of the state. Most notably, convinced that the Huguenots were disloyal, he used military force to destroy their political and military power. In 1628 their largest fortified city, La Rochelle, fell to Richelieu’s forces after a 14-month siege.

Mazarin and young Louis XIV. Richelieu’s hand-picked successor, Jules Mazarin, continued his program of strengthening the monarch through centralization. When Louis XIV inherited the throne in 1643 at age five, his mother, Anne of Austria, became regent. Mazarin continued as chief minister and the two led France together until Mazarin died in 1661. Meanwhile, young Louis was witness to all the challenges and intrigues affecting the monarchy and he learned well at the feet of Mazarin. The minister’s most serious challenge was a series of rebellions by discontented nobles and others, known as the Fronde. These sporadic civil wars went on from 1648 to 1653. During that time Mazarin even had to leave France twice. In the end, however, the Fronde was crushed. When Mazarin died in 1661, he left the most powerful kingdom in continental Europe in the hands of Louis XIV. During Louis’s long reign, which

lasted until his death in 1715, the strength and prestige of the French monarchy became the envy of all the crowns of Europe.

THE MONARCHY OF LOUIS XIV

With Mazarin gone, one of Louis's first decisions was not to appoint another first minister. From then on he ruled personally.

Social and Political Aspects. At least on the surface, everything good seemed to happen to France at the time of Louis XIV. Literature and the arts, characterized by a revival of classical antiquity as well as glorification of the state, flourished under his patronage. For the first time in history, France was the dominant power in European politics. Through the grandeur of his court, his absolute power, and the brilliance of French culture, the "Sun King," as Louis was sometimes called, eclipsed all others. When Louis sneezed, it was said, all Europe caught cold.

The Significance of Versailles. About ten miles outside Paris, in the small town of Versailles, Louis XIII had built a royal hunting lodge. There Louis XIV created the grandest court of Europe. The elaborate art and architecture, together with the magnificent grounds and fountains, were deliberately and skillfully designed to overawe all who came. The nobility were required to live there for at least part of each year. What they did there, however, demonstrates the degraded state of their power even while they enjoyed the trappings of their position. They went to endless balls, parties and musical productions. They played essential roles in the elaborate ceremonies that took place at the king's bedtime, when he arose, at mealtimes, and at state affairs. For all practical purposes, however, they became little more than ornaments of the court, enjoying the resplendence of Versailles but excluded from the king's councils and this having no power at all.

Absolutist government. Louis ruled through an extensive bureaucracy consisting of three main councils of state, several lesser administrative councils, and a host of civil servants. He personally attended all the sessions of the major councils. Royal intendants carried out their decisions. Thirteen regional parliaments took care of local affairs, but their power was extremely limited. With a military and civil establishment personally loyal to him, Louis seemingly held all power.

Mercantilism and the Economy. Outward appearances to the contrary, Louis never had enough money to support all he tried to do. In particular, his incessant wars drained the treasury and imposed increasingly heavy tax burdens on the people.

Jean-Baptiste Colbert, controller-general of finances, tried to improve the economy by applying the principles of mercantilism – the philosophy that all economic activity must be regulated in way that promoted the interest of the state. He imposed tariffs to raise the prices of French goods and keep French industries alive. He also subsidized key industries, including textile manufacturers, and set up a rigid inspection system for quality control.

When Colbert died in 1683, France was beginning to enjoy a new era of prosperity, especially among the commercial classes. Before Louis dies, however, the economy was in shambles. Poor harvests, soaring grain prices, the cost of war, rising taxes and several factors all combined to bring new suffering, even starvation, to the peasants. Threats of rebellion were not uncommon, and many peasants emigrated elsewhere.

War, Expansion and Balance of Power. Louis, nevertheless, gloried in war. It was necessary, he seemed to believe, to national unity as well as to demonstrate to the world the strength of his monarchy. It was also expand his domain. In 1667 and again in 1672, for example, he invaded the Netherlands, where he took over several Flemish towns. In 1681 he conquered the city of Strasbourg. One result of his expansionism was the formation of the League of Augsburg in an attempt to stop him. During the nine-year War of the League of Augsburg (1689-1697), Louis gained nothing.

War of the Spanish Succession. In 1700 Louis's grandson inherited the Spanish throne, reigning as Philip V. This seemingly propitious event delighted Louis. It dismayed other European powers, however, for the alliance of these two thrones meant nothing more than French hegemony in Europe and an upset in the balance of power. The result was a twelve-year dynastic war, the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1714). Financially unprepared, and at a time when France was being torn apart internally, Louis marched into the Spanish Netherlands to protect his claims. He found himself facing the newly formed Grand Alliance of the Hague, consisting of the Netherlands, England and the Holy Roman Empire. Like other wars, the War of the Spanish Succession extended itself beyond the European continent; fighting occurred in both India and in America. In the end, it was Louis who pleaded for peace.

Treaty of Utrecht. The war ended with the Treaty of Utrecht (1713-1714). The result was that Philip retained his throne, but only at the cost of Louis's most important objective. He had to agree that the French and Spanish crowns could never be united. The European powers had consciously put into operation the principle of balance of power and had set limits on how far one of their number could expand. A hundred years later, as a result of the Napoleonic wars, the same principle would be applied to France even more forcefully.

Flaws and Weaknesses in Louis's System. Clearly, despite outward appearances, there were serious imperfections in Louis XIV's absolutist state. The king was always in danger of antagonizing deeply entrenched vested interests. Much of his power came by compromise. The large number of councils led to administrative inefficiency. Bribery and other kinds of corruption in government ran rampant. There was also widespread misery and seething discontent in France, partly as a result of heavy taxation. The seemingly unending wars were not only unpopular, but also too expensive. By the time Louis died, France was some 3 billion livres in debt.

Louis left an unenviable legacy for his successors. Louis XV, however, paid little attention to governing and left the affairs of state in even greater disarray than his father. From such seeds his son, Louis XVI, would reap the disastrous harvest of revolution.

ABSOLUTISM IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

In the 17th century strong rulers arose within the Holy Roman Empire, though there were variations in the nature of their absolutism. Two major powers, Austria and Prussia, emerged as the empire itself decayed. At the same time, Russia became an important new power in European politics.

HAPSBURG AUSTRIA

In 1648, at the end of the Thirty Years' War, the Holy Roman Empire was hardly an empire at all. It was really a confederation of about 300 independent kingdoms only loosely united under a member of the Austrian Habsburg family who held the title of emperor. The Habsburgs, however, had little real power; what they did have came mainly through bargaining and compromise with local bishops and princes. Their hereditary lands included Bohemia, part of Hungary, Croatia and Transylvania, but even there they needed the cooperation of the local nobility in order to exercise power. Their fondest goal was to create some kind of unified state that they could control. They were held back, however, not just by geography and local politics, but also by great diversity in languages and cultures – a problem that has persisted in the area to the present day (i.e. Slavics, Huns, Germans, Protestant, Orthodox, Catholic, etc).

Strengthening the Monarchy. Leopold I, emperor from 1657 to 1705, made some important military moves toward strengthening the monarchy and bringing a sense of unity into the Habsburg lands. He successfully repelled an invasion by the Turks. He conquered the remaining parts of Hungary and Transylvania that were not already firmly under his rule and extended his holdings into much of twentieth-century Yugoslavia. He also suppressed a rebellion of the Magyars, the dominant people of Hungary.

The Pragmatic Sanctions. The Habsburg monarchy faced a new crisis when Charles VI, emperor from 1711 to 1740, had no son. Since there was no precedent in Austria for a female ruler, Charles feared that after his death the Habsburg holdings would be divided up. His *Pragmatic Sanctions* was a legal document intended to ensure a single hereditary succession to Habsburg lands beginning with his daughter Maria Theresa. He thought the other powers had accepted the principle, and Maria Theresa duly succeeded her father. Within two months, believing the Austrians would not rally behind a female ruler, Frederick II of Prussia invaded her lands.

The War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748). Frederick II of Prussia (see below) saw Maria Theresa's succession as a chance to grab the mineral-rich province of Silesia. He not only caught her off guard but surprised the other European powers as well. It was not long, however, before several traditional Habsburg rivals (Britain, Italy) joined in the conquest, while France came to the aid of Maria Theresa. Finally at the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, the young empress gave up her claims to Silesia. In the meantime, the war expanded in scope far beyond the original intent of Frederick (see Overlapping Wars below).

Maria Theresa and Habsburg Power. Despite the problems she encountered on her succession, Maria Theresa took some important steps toward strengthening Habsburg power. The sudden confrontation with the powers of Europe may, in fact, have acted as a catalyst in her determination to strengthen the central administration. She improved tax collection, even forcing the nobles and clergy to submit to at least minimal taxation. She created a more effective bureaucracy, centered in Vienna. Not considered an enlightened despot, she nevertheless expanded her reforms to provide some relief for

overburdened and overtaxed peasants. The aristocracy was no longer able to require as much work from them.

HOHENZOLLERN PRUSSIA

Austria thus emerged from the ruins of the crumbling Holy Roman Empire as one of the major states of Europe. So, too, did Prussia. The Holy Roman Empire still existed in theory, and emperors continued to be named. But one of the greatest clichés in history is also one of the most accurate – the empire was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire.

The Great Elector. Frederick William, a member of the Hohenzollern family, became the elector of Brandenburg, one of the Prussian states, in 1640. The term “elector” referred to his right to help select the emperor. Eventually Frederick became known as the “Great Elector.” The provinces ruled by his family were widely scattered, each dominated by its own legislature, or estate. It was Frederick William’s challenge to turn them into a single centralized state. Like all absolutists, he quickly set about strengthening his personal army. He also took taxing power from the nobles (known as “junkers”). He did not undermine their authority over the peasants, as some monarchs did, but co-opted them by making them bureaucrats.

Frederick William I and the Prussian Kingdom. Frederick William’s son, who succeeded his father in 1688, received a more tightly controlled state than any Prussian ruler yet. Then, in exchange for his support in the War of the Spanish Succession, the Holy Roman Emperor (Leopold I, a Habsburg) granted him the title “King of Prussia.” He ruled as Frederick I. His son, Frederick William I, reigned from 1713 to 1740 and finally completed the work of consolidation begun by the Great Elector. He eliminated the estates, thus concentrating power into a central administration. His strong, effective bureaucracy was unusually free from corruption. He was hardly an enlightened despot, however, for he did nothing about the heavy burdens borne by the peasants (this helped gain the support of his nobility). At the same time, he had a passionate love for the military. He built a large, highly disciplined, well-equipped army that became known as the best in Europe. Frederick William was wise enough to seldom use his army, however. It was a symbol of Prussian power, but not something to be thrown at every whim.

Frederick the Great. His son, Frederick II, who ruled from 1740 to 1786, thus came by his military proficiency quite naturally. He had spent much of his youth studying politics and war and became a brilliant military strategist. Almost his first act as king was to take over Silesia, touching off the War of the Austrian Succession. Later he demonstrated his exceptional talents in the Seven Years’ War (see below), after which he came to be called Frederick the Great. In his continuing efforts to strengthen the kingdom, Frederick added to his territory by occupying most of West Prussia. He improved the bureaucracy by raising the standards of civil service and severely punishing corruption and inefficiency. Economically, like other rulers of his time, he promoted the principles of mercantilism. He also worked hard to rebuild industry and agriculture that had been ravaged during various wars.

Frederick’s Enlightened Despotism. As a young man Frederick spent his leisure time engrossed in reading literature, studying philosophy, writing poetry, and carrying on correspondence with the intellectuals of the Enlightenment (see below). He developed a particular affection for Voltaire and later entertained him at the Prussian court. Such interests no doubt helped stimulate Frederick’s commitment to enlightened monarchy. His concern for the people was demonstrated in a variety of ways. He expanded freedom of speech and of the press and promoted education. The legal system and the courts were reformed during his reign. He also did away with torture, except for crimes such as murder or treason. He promoted religious toleration, even allowing Jesuits (members of a well-disciplined Catholic missionary order) into his Protestant kingdom. His toleration went only so far, however, for he would not allow the immigration of Jews. Neither did he range very far in the area of social reform on behalf of the peasants, who remained tied to the estates of the Junkers. Nevertheless, historians generally recognize him a model of enlightened despotism.

Frederick died in 1786. His son, Frederick William II, inherited a strong, financially sound, consolidated state that ranked among the most powerful in Europe.

ROMANOV RUSSIA

As the kings of France, Austria, and Prussia were building their absolutist states, another actor stepped onto the stage of European politics. In Russia, the Romanov family created a dynasty that lasted from 1613 to 1917, longer than any of the others. It became a powerful new force for European powers to reckon with.

Prior to 1613, when Michael Romanov became tsar, anarchy and civil war dominated Russian politics. By the time of Peter the Great appeared on the scene, however, the Romanovs had created a somewhat stable monarchy with a centralized bureaucracy. There were also various powerful groups that could cause problems. The *streltsy* (elite Russian guards) constituted a powerful class at court. The *Boyars* (nobles) were proud and haughty and could change political loyalties at any time. Already the tsars had catered to them in various ways. The tsars had also created what amounted to a kind of feudalism by giving large amounts of land grants, along with serfs to work the land, to loyal civil and military officials. In addition, the Greek Orthodox Church became increasingly political.

PETER THE GREAT. In 1682 a ten-year-old boy named Peter and his sickly brother Ivan found themselves in a most impractical situation. They were named dual monarchs, with their sister Sophia as regent. In 1689, however, Sophia was overthrown, and a few years later Ivan died. During the course of his reign, which lasted until 1725, Peter became known as Peter the Great.

Peter's goals. Peter was convinced that he must make his position immune against intrigue. He was also fascinated with the West, in 1697 Peter traveled in disguise throughout western Europe. He became determined to imitate almost everything he saw in his effort to reform Russia and make it a first-rate military power. He also set about to undermine the power of the boyars and *streltsy*, control the church, strengthen the central authority and improve the economy. Like other monarchs in his quest of absolutism, he was not loathe to use ruthlessness and violence to achieve his ends.

Westernization. Peter encouraged the flow of Western ideas into Russia, primarily to strengthen the military and the bureaucracy. He encouraged his people to acquire Western-style technical and administrative skills to apply to the military as well as to business and industry. Peter urged more education, much of it based on Western learning, especially for the nobility. To facilitate this, he had many Western books translated into Russian. Western-style dress was also introduced. He received considerable opposition, however, when he required the boyars and others to shave their beards, for this flew in the face of long-standing religious tradition.

Expansionism. Russia, boasting a standing army of over 200,000 men, was in almost constant warfare throughout Peter's reign. One reason was Peter's effort to extend his territories. It was especially important to secure warm-water seaports so that Russia could trade more easily with the West and influence European affairs more fully. This goal was finally achieved in 1721, at the end of a war with Sweden; Russia acquired Estonia, Livonia, and part of Finland. This gave Peter considerable territory on the Baltic Sea and his cherished "window on the West," which resulted in increased trade, especially with Great Britain.

St. Petersburg. Significantly, it was in this coastal territory that Peter found his new capital city, St. Petersburg. It became a magnificent city, partly intended to do for Peter what Versailles did for Louis XIV. Nobles were compelled to live in St. Petersburg most of the year, and they paid for a major share of its construction. By 1782, during the reign of Catherine the Great, St. Petersburg boasted a population of nearly 300,000.

The Problem of Succession. Like most other absolute monarchies, Peter's had its weaknesses. One was related to the problem of hereditary succession. After his only son died, Peter claimed the right to name his successor himself. However, he failed to name one. This led to continual rivalries and intrigues as, for a time, the nobles and military decided who would rule. Succeeding tsars were at best mediocre in their talents. It was nearly forty years before Russia had another who could match the distinction of Peter the Great.

CATHERINE THE GREAT. In 1762 the weak, unbalanced Peter III came to power. He had been married for seventeen years to an intelligent, shrewd German princess named Catherine. Already she had learned the secrets of palace intrigue, and it was possibly with her connivance that Peter was murdered only a few months after he had ascended to the throne. She reigned for 34 years, becoming known as Catherine the Great.

Catherine as Enlightened Despot. Like most great despots of her time, Catherine was both able and ruthless. Nevertheless, she had drunk deeply at the well of the Enlightenment, and she was determined to become an enlightened despot. Far in advance of Peter, who promoted Westernization largely because of what it would do for the military, she attempted to reform Russia for the sake of Russia itself. Among other things, she founded two hospitals, a college of medicine, a public library, and a girl's school. She brought in Western art, architecture, literature, music and Western ideas of all sorts. She also limited the use of torture and extended religious freedom. For the sake of public health she advocated inoculation against small pox, setting the example of being publicly inoculated herself.

Expansionism. Economically, Catherine improved Russian trade, both internally and externally. At the same time, she kept alive the quest for warm-water ports, which led to war with the Ottoman empire between 1769 and 1774. She had long wished to drive the Turks from Europe away (which was a popular goal of the other European monarchs), and at the end of the war she had control of several Ottoman provinces along the Danube as well as an outlet to the Black Sea. In 1783 she annexed the Crimea. Significantly, it was also during Catherine's reign that Russia began to explore the northern American coastline, setting the stage for more direct imperialist activity in America in the nineteenth century.

Partition of Poland. One of the most important results of Catherine's expansionism was the partition of Poland (a long enemy of the Russians), an enterprise that represented balance-of-power at its extreme. Her annexations of the provinces along the Danube had upset that balance. At the same time, the Polish monarchy was promoting certain reforms that, if extended, could threaten absolutism itself. Frederick the Great of Prussia, therefore, made a proposal that Catherine could hardly turn down. He suggested that Catherine return the Danube provinces, but at the same time, Prussia, Austria and Russia would each take over a large slice of Polish territory. Catherine thus gained a huge new addition to her empire that included nearly 2 million people. In two later partitions in 1793 and 1795, the three powers carved up the rest of Poland, which then disappeared from the map as an independent state until after WWI.

CONSTITUTIONAL BRITAIN

In 1603 a new line of rulers, the Stuarts, came to the English throne in the person of James I. There was a great potential for conflict, however. The Stuarts longed for absolutism, yet Parliament was uneasy at the moves already taken in that direction. The Church of England was bitterly divided. In the face of such friction, Stuart power gradually waned, even being temporarily eliminated between 1649 and 1660. By the end of the century, England had evolved into a model of limited monarchy.

The Early Stuarts. The attempts of the early Stuarts to create an absolutist state proved disastrous. James I, for example, antagonized almost everyone. Parliament was especially resentful when he assumed the power to levy customs duties without its consent. Puritans were upset at his plan to strengthen the Anglican episcopacy (church hierarchy). In addition, his apparent pro-Catholic sentiment did not sit well with any English Protestants.

Charles I versus Parliament. His son, Charles I, who came to power in 1625, acted much the same way, which resulted in a series of open confrontations with Parliament. When Charles went to Parliament for funds, it insisted that he sign a document that prohibited fund raising without its approval. It also forbade other things that tended to support absolutism, such as arbitrary imprisonment. Charles signed in order to get the money, but then in 1629 dissolved Parliament. He functioned independently until 1640. Meanwhile, religious tensions mounted over efforts of Charles and Archbishop William Laud to impose Anglican uniformity on all the churches. When they tried to do it in Scotland, war broke out and Charles was forced to reconvene Parliament to ask for more funds. Parliament refused, and Charles dissolved it again. Later in the year, however, he called it together again. At that point, Parliament rebelled, passing laws that limited the power of the monarchy and made levying taxes without Parliamentary consent illegal. Archbishop Laud, meanwhile, was emphasizing the divine right of kings as well as trying to promote the power of the church hierarchy. In 1641 he was impeached and imprisoned, and four years later he was executed.

Civil War. Charles soon saw an opportunity to reassert himself, but his actions led to full-scale civil war. When a rebellion broke out in Ireland in 1641, Parliament was divided over whether to give the king an army to suppress it. Taking advantage of the stalemate, Charles raised an army and in January 1642 invaded Parliament. That body, however, had raised its own army, and the war that resulted lasted for seven years (1642-1649). Oliver Cromwell turned the Parliamentary army into a will-disciplined, highly motivated fighting machine. Charles was defeated. Parliament then executed him on January 30, 1649.

The Commonwealth. At that point Parliament declared that England was a commonwealth. It abolished the monarchy, the House of Lords and the Church of England as the state religion. Cromwell's army, meanwhile, conquered both Ireland and Scotland. As a member of Parliament, Cromwell also called for various other reforms. When these reforms were not forthcoming, he marched in and disbanded Parliament in 1653.

Cromwell as Lord Protector. The following year a new assembly, controlled by Cromwell, named him Lord Protector. For the next five years he was virtually a military dictator. Some writers judge Cromwell's rule harshly. They point to his merciless suppression of the Catholics in Ireland, to other military adventures that were overwhelmingly expensive, to a decline in trade and commerce, and to the

many rather harsh Puritan laws that were nobly inspired but also unpopular. He also censored the press and undermined other political liberties.

Cromwell's defenders view him a courageous, unselfish and highly devoted to the cause of Puritanism. They also observe that he was genuinely reluctant to stay in office, though while there he used the office to promote measures that he felt could only improve the moral character of the people. The closing of theatres, gambling houses, and saloons were among the measures. He was generally tolerant toward religion; he allowed all Christians, except Catholics, to practice their faiths freely. Cromwell also extended toleration to Jews and Quakers. But however he may be judged, by the time Cromwell died in 1658, the people generally were weary of military dictatorship. Soon the army invited Parliament back into session.

The Stuart Restoration. In 1660, at the invitation of Parliament, the Stuart family again occupied the throne of England, this time in the person of Charles II. The Anglican church was again the established church. Charles hoped to achieve the absolutist goals of his predecessors. Yet even before he was officially restored, his position was weakened when he was forced to make specific promises with respect to sharing power with Parliament. Interpreting those promises led to bitter divisions and to the rise of the first permanent political parties in modern history. Religious issues were at the heart of much of the tension. The king's opponents, who included the nonconforming Protestants, soon gained control of Parliament. They proposed an *Exclusion Bill* prohibiting Charles' brother James, a Catholic, from coming to the throne. Those favoring exclusion (and hence tending to oppose religious liberty) were called *Whigs*, while the others were dubbed *Tories*. The bill passed the House of Commons, but not the House of Lords.

The Glorious Revolution. Charles's brother succeeded him as James II. He immediately came into conflict with Parliament over religious issues. He finally dissolved Parliament and suspended all acts against Catholics and Anglican dissenters. In June 1688 James's Catholic wife gave birth to a son, raising the specter of a Catholic heir. This raised the religious question to such heights that Tories and Whigs joined in a coalition against the king. Just a month after the birth of his son, they invited James's daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange, governor of the Netherlands, to become joint monarchs of England. James was easily deposed, and this bloodless coup went down in history as the Glorious Revolution.

Constitutional Monarchy. The Glorious Revolution laid the foundation for a permanent constitutional monarchy. The new rulers agreed to several acts of Parliament that specifically limited their power. Citizens were given the right to petition the king for redress of grievances. In addition, it was declared that only Protestants could become king. Known in history as the English Bill of Rights, a group of laws was approved in December 1689. Parliament also granted more religious toleration, at least to Protestants. This helped pave the way for England and Scotland to be officially joined together in 1707, becoming the united kingdom of Great Britain.

Cabinet and Ministerial Government. After the Glorious Revolution the monarchs began to exercise what power they had through a council of Parliamentary leaders known officially as the Privy Council. Later it was called the cabinet (a term derived from the fact that initially they met in a small room called the cabinet). Its members were selected by the king, or later, his chief minister. In 1714 a new line of rulers, from the German house of Hanover, began to reign. This led to even less involvement by the king in the daily affairs of government, as George I allowed his ministers to exercise power for him while he spent time in Germany. The same was true with his son George II, under whom Sir Robert Walpole became chief minister. With the king's support, his own ability to control the House of Commons, and his effective use and control of government patronage, Walpole dominated the government from 1721 to 1742. Walpole exercised his office so skillfully that he had gone down in history as Britain's first prime minister, even though that office did not officially come into being until the 1750s.

The last British king to make any effort to reassert old monarchial prerogatives was George III, who began his sixty-year reign in 1760. He believed he was only reclaiming legitimate constitutional rights. In doing so, he not only antagonized many people at home, but also lost his American colonies. In contrast to the rest of Europe, parliamentary government and constitutional monarchy was the established order in Britain.

RIVALRIES OF STATES

As France, England, Austria, Prussia and Russia each became powerful nation-states, they also became highly competitive; each sought a balance of political and economic power that would promote its own self-interest. By the mid-eighteenth century all of them, particularly England and France, were

engaged in an intense, worldwide commercial competition that was inextricably entwined with their political ambitions.

Overlapping Wars. Frequently that competition broke out in commercial wars; sometimes these wars overlapped, as in the case of the War of Jenkins' Ear and the War of the Austrian Succession.

In America, the French and the British were involved in intense rivalries in the West Indies. At the same time, mariners from both countries were anxious to open trade with the Spanish colonies on the mainland, but under Spanish mercantilist policies this was illegal. They became adept at smuggling, even though the Spanish maintained coastal patrols in an effort to stop such activities. In 1731 English sea captain Robert Jenkins's ship was boarded by a Spanish patrol searching for contraband. In a scuffle that followed, a Spaniard cut of Jenkins's ear. British merchants and West Indian financial interests pressed for retaliation, but nothing happened for seven years. In 1738, however, during a particularly intense debate in Parliament, Jenkins appeared in London displaying his preserved but withered ear in a move to reinforce the image of Spanish brutality. The following year Britain declared war on Spain.

What happened next demonstrates the broad scope of international rivalries in the mid-eighteenth century. When the War of the Austrian Succession broke out in 1740, France gave its support to Prussia. This, in turn, brought England, France's traditional rival, into the war on the side of Austria in an effort to maintain the balance of power. In 1744 France decided to expand the fighting to America, thus merging with Spain in the War of Jenkins's Ear. So far as England, France and Spain were concerned, however, the war ended with things little different than they were before the fighting began.

The Great War for Empire. Peace, however, was only temporary. In 1754 war between France and England broke out again, this time in America. Known in American history as the French and Indian War, it went on for nine years. It became one element of the larger conflict that erupted on the European continent two years later and became known as the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). It has since been renamed to the Great War for Empire.

In America the fighting broke out over conflicting French and British colonial claims in the Ohio Valley. In Europe, meanwhile, the monarchies continued to compete for power and to shift alliances in whatever direction seemed most advantageous at the time. Great Britain and Prussia (only recently enemies in the War of the Austrian Succession) joined in a defensive alliance aimed at protecting German lands from invasion. Since Prussia and Austria were enemies, this had the effect of pitting Britain against Austria, even though these two states had long been allied in the wars of Louis XIV. Austria then made a defensive alliance with France.

Smoldering tensions broke into all-out war after Frederick II, suspecting a conspiracy against Prussia between Saxony, Austria and France, sent troops to invade Saxony. It was not long before France, Austria, Sweden, Russia and a number of smaller German states all were involved, intent on destroying Prussia. In 1762, however, Russia's new tsar, Peter III (under influence of his German wife Catherine, which then used her influence to gain parts of Poland from Prussia), made peace with Prussia. This along, with heavy financial assistance from Britain, enabled Frederick to hold his ground against the other powers.

In the conflict between Great Britain and France, meanwhile, William Pitt, who became Britain's prime minister in 1758, was determined to drive France from North America. The British soon gained the upper hand on the seas by practically demolishing the French fleet, thus preventing the French from sending reinforcements to America. British troops overwhelmed Canada and before the war was over, most the French West Indies had also fallen to the British. In India, the French were defeated at the Battle of Plassey in 1757.

The Great War for Empire was, in fact, the first world war. The major European powers fought with each other in North America and the Caribbean, on the Atlantic, on the European continent, in the Mediterranean, in Africa and in India. Ending with the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the war momentous consequences for world history. The general balance of power was maintained on the European continent. France gave up most of North America, except for two fishing islands off Newfoundland and several sugar colonies in the Caribbean. It was also required to remove its troops from India, thus paving the way for the British conquests of the subcontinent. England also got possession of Spanish-controlled Florida.