

The List: "Most influential Enlightenment Philosopher"

Once you have completed the Enlightenment Salon and have reviewed the material in your textbook as well as this module, it is time for you to determine who was the most influential of the philosophers.

Choose 3 philosophers and write a 1-2 paragraph summary for each which should include:

- Philosopher name
- Title of Major Work
- Basic Beliefs
- Why you feel the philosopher deserves to be listed among the most influential

Then, rank your 3 choices in order of preference. When you are satisfied with your list, submit your rankings and summaries.

1. Rousseau

Rousseau is known for writing *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, famous for explaining Rousseau's belief that all humans are born naturally good and then made corrupt by the failings of society. Generally, Rousseau was highly praising of nature, and staunch in his mindset that the faults of humans had twisted and corrupted. *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* was widely read and famed throughout his life. Rousseau was also known for the publication of *The Social Contract*, in which he attempted to theorize about the most effective type of political community following the problems that arose in the commercial societies that had emerged, societies which he had identified in previous works. These more controversial works led to Rousseau being quite a controversial figure later on in his life, but his works had a profound impact on future political philosophy, and philosophy in general. Many of the most important works in political philosophy were based on Rousseau's studies, and the contributions that he made to the philosophical field.

2. John Locke

John Locke is considered to be one of the founders of British Empiricism, contributing greatly to political theory and philosophy over the duration of his life in the 17th century. Locke's theories were empirical in nature, proposing that human knowledge was derived from observation and experience, using what knowledge as has been acquired in the past and in the present by the senses to synthesize new ideas. His most important work is widely considered to be his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in which he sets out to examine the human mind and its functioning in order to develop his ideas on how humans were to acquire knowledge and work to better themselves. John Locke is also well known for being a proponent of the Social Contract theory of government being a social contract in which people gave up certain freedoms for certain securities provided by a government to ensure order, an idea that would prove important in the Revolutions of the Age of Enlightenment, including America and France. He wrote about these ideas in another very important work, *Two Treatises of Government*.

As the man responsible for propagating the social contract theory as well as ideas of empiricism, John Locke is deserving of an important place in the ranking of

influential philosophers. Locke's ideas were important in guiding the American Revolution as well as changes in European politics. His ideas were also important in driving the scientific community and philosophical community forward in using observation and reason and experimentation in discovery of knowledge. This helped to move Europe away from the old ways of the past.

3. Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon was an influential scientist and philosopher of the 16th and 17th centuries who is credited for his work on empiricism and the scientific method. Over the course of his life, Bacon worked to rebuild learning and education as he saw fit for the benefit of society. He wrote the *Novum Organum* or "New Method" in 1620 as part of *the Great Instauration*, helping to outline his ideas of 'Baconian' philosophy. Bacon proposed ideas of empirical and inductive learning to replace the already extant methods of education. He came up with an entirely new system and throughout his entire life was wholly devoted to the idea of innovating and revamping traditional education. His end goals for his new system was mostly pragmatic, as he sought practical knowledge that would aid mankind. Bacon left behind an impact on his constant questionings of traditional education methods, and, due to his evaluations of traditional learning, many have been granted a unique perspective into the world of learning that was heavily contributed to by Bacon.

Rankings:

1. John Locke
2. Rousseau
3. Francis Bacon

Sources:

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/locke/>

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/rousseau/>

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/bacon/>