
The Enlightenment- Notable French Philosophers

- Renee Descartes
 - Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu
 - François-Marie Arouet AKA Voltaire
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Learning Objectives

Identify Descartes and explain his philosophy

Identify Montesquieu and his philosophy

Identify Voltaire and his philosophy

Descartes



Biography

“René Descartes was born to Joachim Descartes and Jeanne Brochard on March 31, 1596 in La Haye, France. The Descartes clan was a bourgeois family composed of mostly doctors and some lawyers.

He joined the army in order to travel, but was sickly and stayed in his quarters to study mathematics most of the time.

Descartes moved to the Netherlands in late 1628 and, despite several changes of address and a few trips back to France, he remained there until moving to Sweden at the invitation of Queen Christina in late 1649.

He moved to the Netherlands in order to achieve solitude and quiet that he could not attain with all the distractions of Paris. He died shortly after moving to Sweden.”

Philosophy- “I Think, Therefore I Am”

“René Descartes is often credited with being the “Father of Modern Philosophy.” This title is justified due both to his break with traditional philosophy prevalent at his time and to his development and promotion of the new, mechanistic sciences.

His basic strategy was to consider false any belief that falls prey to even the slightest doubt. From here Descartes sets out to find something that lies beyond all doubt. He eventually discovers that “I exist” is impossible to doubt and is, therefore, absolutely certain.

It is from this point that Descartes proceeds to demonstrate God’s existence and that God cannot be a deceiver. This, in turn, serves to fix the certainty of everything that is clearly and distinctly understood

Montesquieu



Biography

“Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, was born on January 19th, 1689 at La Brède, near Bordeaux, to a noble and prosperous family.

He was educated at the Oratorian Collège de Juilly, received a law degree from the University of Bordeaux in 1708, and went to Paris to continue his legal studies.

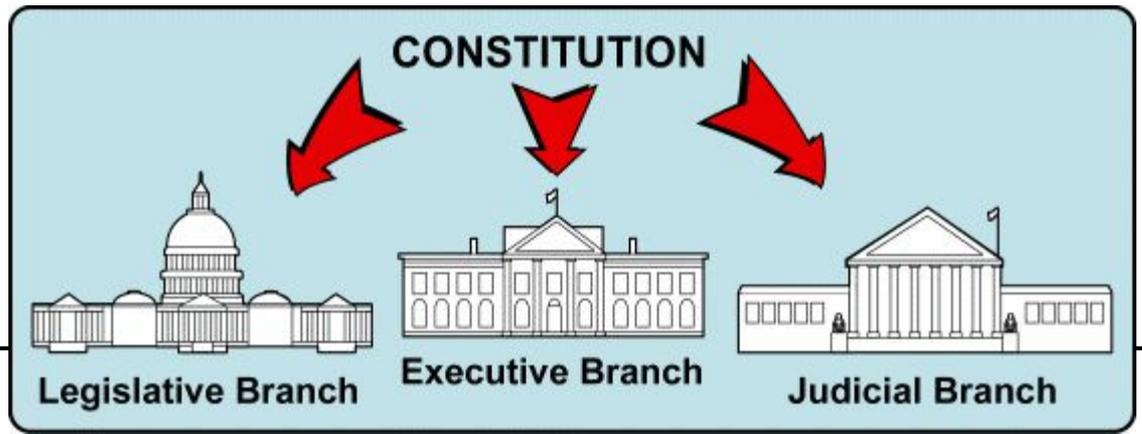
On the death of his father in 1713 he returned to La Brède to manage the estates he inherited, and in 1715 he married Jeanne de Lartigue, a practicing Protestant, with whom he had a son and two daughters.

In 1716 he inherited from his uncle the title Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu and the office of Président à Mortier in the Parlement of Bordeaux, which was at the time chiefly a judicial and administrative body. F

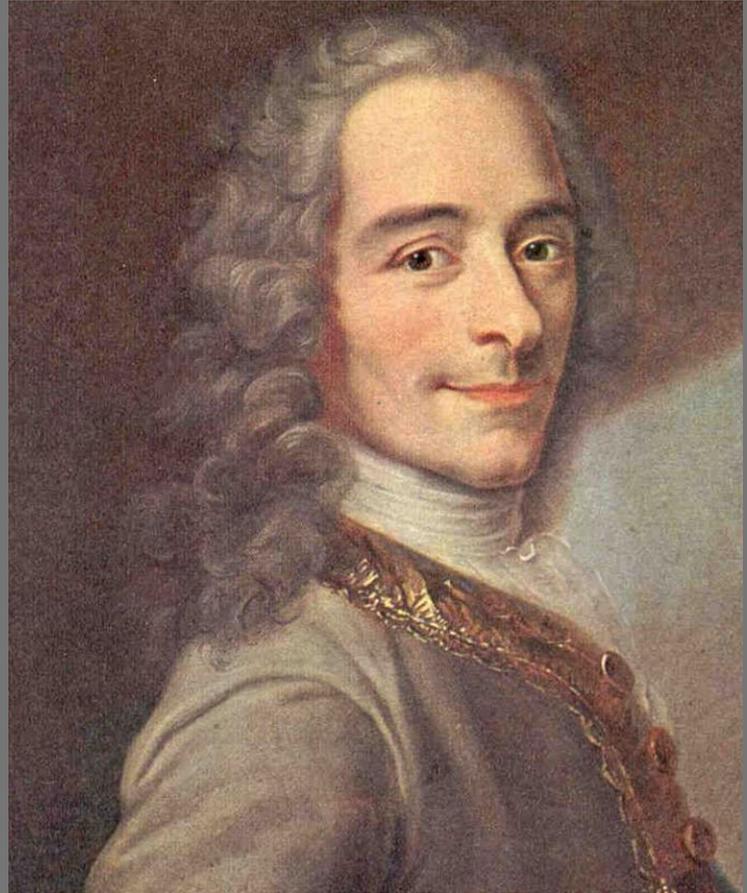
or the next eleven years he presided over the Tournelle, the Parlement's criminal division, in which capacity he heard legal proceedings, supervised prisons, and administered various punishments including torture.”

Philosophy

“He explained how governments might be preserved from corruption. He saw despotism, in particular, as a standing danger for any government not already despotic, and argued that it could best be prevented by a system in which different bodies exercised legislative, executive, and judicial power, and in which all those bodies were bound by the rule of law. This theory of the separation of powers had an enormous impact on liberal political theory, and on the framers of the constitution of the United States of America.”



Voltaire



Philosophy

“Voltaire (real name François-Marie Arouet) (1694 - 1778) was a French philosopher and writer of the Age of Enlightenment. His intelligence, wit and style made him one of France's greatest writers and philosophers, despite the controversy he attracted.

He was an outspoken supporter of social reform (including the defence of civil liberties, freedom of religion and free trade), despite the strict censorship laws and harsh penalties of the period, and made use of his satirical works to criticize Catholic dogma and the French institutions of his day.

He was a prolific writer, and produced works in almost every literary form (plays, poetry, novels, essays, historical and scientific works, over 21,000 letters and over two thousand books and pamphlets).”

Biography

“Voltaire was born on 21 November 1694 in Paris, France, the youngest of five children in a middle-class family. His father was François Arouet, a notary and minor treasury official; his mother was Marie Marguerite d'Aumart, from a noble family of Poitou province.

By the time he left college, Voltaire had already decided he wanted to become a writer. However, his father very much wanted him to become a lawyer, so Voltaire pretended to work in Paris as an assistant to a lawyer, while actually spending much of his time writing satirical poetry. Even when his father found him out and sent him to study law in the provinces, he nevertheless continued to write.

Voltaire's wit soon made him popular among some of the aristocratic families of Paris and he became a favourite in society circles. “

Biography Continued

“From an early age, Voltaire had trouble with the French authorities for his energetic attacks on the government and the Catholic Church, which resulted in numerous imprisonments and exiles throughout his life.

In 1717, still in his early twenties, he became involved in the Cellamare conspiracy of Giulio Alberoni against Philippe II, Duke of Orléans, and his writings about the Regent led to him being imprisoned in the infamous Bastille for eleven months. While there, however, he wrote his debut play, "Oedipe", whose success established his reputation. In 1718, following this incarceration, he adopted the name "Voltaire", both as a pen-name and for daily use, which many have seen as marking his formal separation from his family and his past.

When he offended a young nobleman, the Chevalier de Rohan, in 1726 a lettre de cachet was issued to exile Voltaire without a trial and he spent almost three years in England from 1726 to 1729. His second exile lasted from 1734 until 1749. Voltaire returned to a hero's welcome in Paris in 1778, at the age of 83. He died shortly after.”

Source: http://www.philosophybasics.com/philosophers_voltaire.html

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Review

Who was Descartes? What was his philosophy?

Who was Montesquieu? What was his philosophy?

Who was Voltaire? What was his philosophy?