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Lecture 1: The Age of Reason

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What is the Age of Reason?

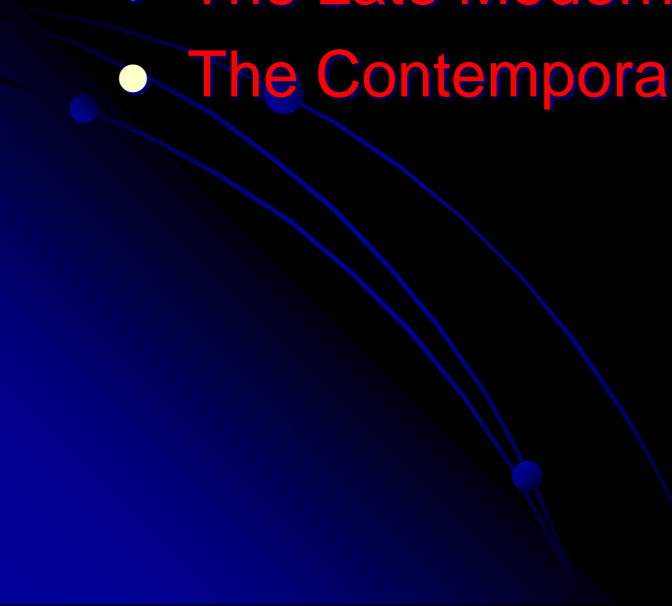
Definition

- **The Age of Reason:**

It is a European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th century that emphasized reason, scientific observation, liberty, and individualism.

- It is most commonly known as “*Enlightenment*”, or “*European Enlightenment*”. It implies bringing light into darkness. The term signifies a mental and moral awakening, in which reason and empirical inquiry serve as guiding lights for human progress. It is a metaphor for replacing superstition and dogma with knowledge and rational understanding.

Major Historical Periods

- **The Classical Antiquity** (around the 8th century BCE to 467 CE): It is characterized by the Greco-Roman world and the spread of Greek and Roman civilizations.
 - **The Middle Ages/ Dark Ages** (467CE-1400)
 - **Early Modern Age** (1400-1750)
 - **The Late Modern Age** (1750-1945)
 - **The Contemporary Era** (c1945-present)
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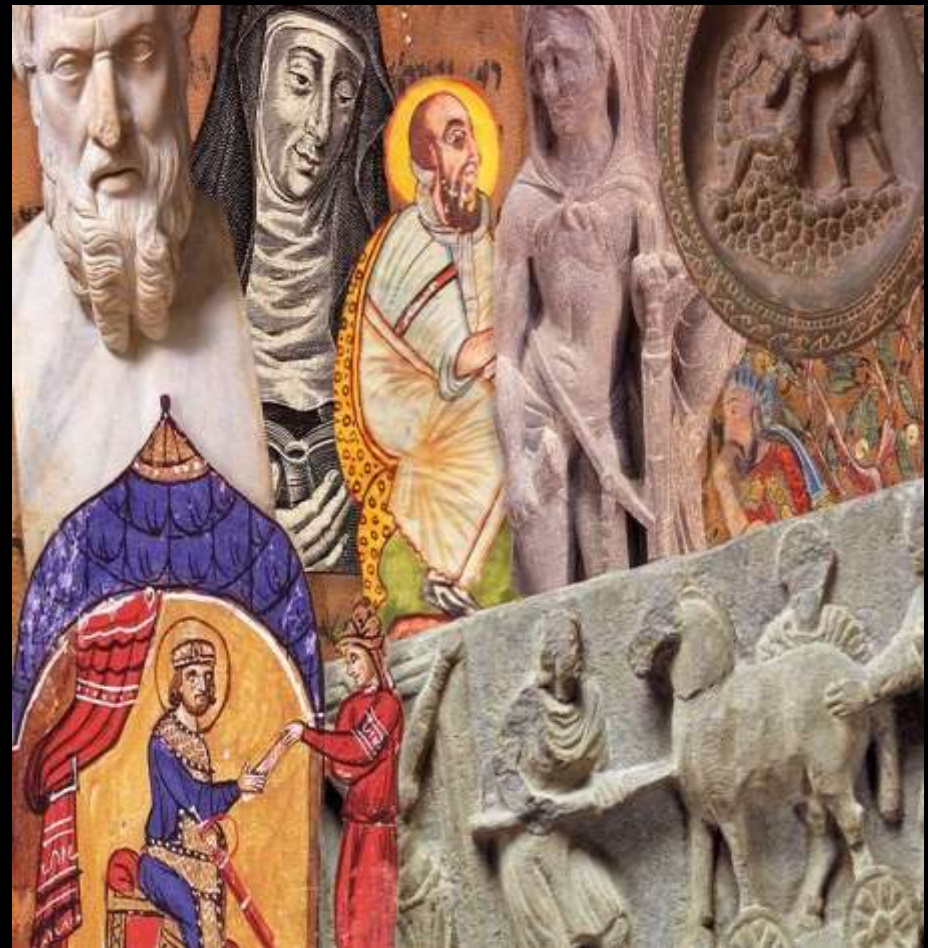
Classical Antiquity

- It refers to the Greco-Roman world. The period starts by the first recorded Greek epic poems by Homer (Iliad and Odyssey) and lasts until the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE and the defeat of the last Roman Emperor Romulus Augustulus by German groups.
- The period saw advancements in architecture, literature, philosophy, linguistic, legal, and religious studies



Dark Ages / Middle Ages

- The period begins with the fall of Rome in 476 CE and lasts until 1400. It is generally divided into: the Early Middle age, the High Middle age, and the Late Middle age.
- The period is referred to by different names: **The Dark Ages**, **the Middle Ages**, and **the Medieval Era**.
- The period was characterized by the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church, absolute monarchies, ignorance and superstitious thinking.



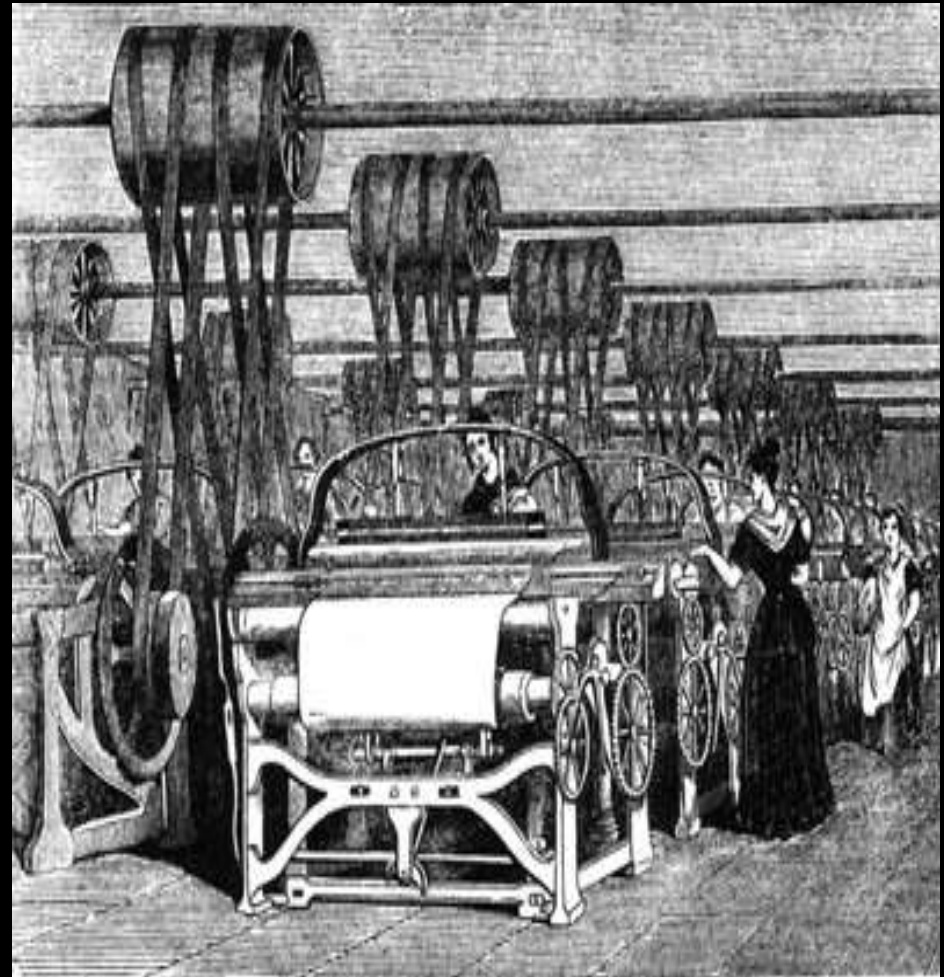
Early Modern Age

- This era includes two major intellectual movements: **Renaissance** (15th-17th century) and **Enlightenment** (17th to the 18th century).
- The Early Modern Age was characterized by profound shifts in science, religion, and philosophy. Key developments included the Protestant Reformation, the European colonization of the Americas, the Scientific Revolution, and the consolidation of centralized monarchies.



Late Modern Age

- It spanned roughly from the early years of the first Industrial Revolution in Britain to the end of WWII in 1945. Key events include the aftermath of the Industrial and French Revolutions, the rise of new ideologies, the World Wars, and rapid advancements in science, technology, and social structures



Contemporary Era

- It starts by the end of WWII till today. It is marked by This period is characterized by significant global events, technological advancements, globalization, and major political and social shifts, including the Cold War, the rise of new nations, and social movements like civil rights and feminism.





The Middle Ages vs. the Age of Reason

The Middle Ages

Period of time: 5th-15th century

Political structure: Spread of Absolute Monarchies, Feudalism.

Social Structure: the three estates system: the clergy, the nobility, and commoners.

Religious Beliefs: Domination of the Roman Catholic Church, and dogmatic thinking.

Intellectual Focus: Religious scholarship and monastic preservation

The Age of Reason

17th to the 18th centuries

Democracy, Social Contract, individual rights, government accountability


Emphasizes individual rights and equality (though it was not easily implemented)

Deism, secularism, and atheism

Logic, questioning everything (especially traditional authority), scientific inventions, and geographical explorations

Roots of Enlightenment

The Age of Reason is almost an extension to the Renaissance (1400-1700) which emerged in Italy (exactly in Florence) with the rise of **Humanism** and **philosophical Naturalism**.





**Humanism and its
Contribution to the Age of
Reason**

Humanism

- Humanism can be defined both as a philosophy and as a movement.
- From a philosophical perspective, Humanism is a **progressive philosophy**, without supernatural beliefs. It affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment. is a **rational philosophy** informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity consonant with social and planetary responsibility. It advocates the extension of participatory democracy and the expansion of the open society, standing for human rights and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as a part of nature.

- Humanism is an **intellectual and cultural movement** primarily identified with the European Renaissance, that shifted focus from purely religious matters to human potential, reason, and the study of classical antiquity. It emerged in **Italy** in the **14th** century, matured in the 15th century, and spread to the rest of Europe from the mid-15th century onwards. The movement's influence was prominent from the mid-14th to mid-17th centuries. The movement originated in Italy and later spread throughout Europe, with key centers of activity including Germany, Holland, and England. It emphasizes human well-being, ethics based on reason and responsibility, and a belief in human agency to create meaning and purpose in this life.

Core Principles and Ideas of Humanism

1. **Individualism and Human Dignity:** emphasized the autonomy, creativity, and intrinsic worth of each person. It rejected the medieval emphasis on collective identity and submission to divine or social hierarchies, arguing instead for the potential and agency of individuals to shape their own destinies.
2. **Freedom:** Freedom is a key principle of humanism, intimately connected to its emphasis on individual dignity, reason, and self-determination. In Renaissance humanism, freedom was understood as the capacity of human beings to think critically, make moral choices, and shape their own destinies independent of external coercion or blind authority.

- **Individual responsibility and Autonomy:** Renaissance humanism posited that humans are morally responsible agents capable of self-governance. Individuals had the freedom to cultivate virtue and pursue ethical ideals, thereby actualizing their full potential and human dignity.
- **Intellectual Development, Educations, and Revival of Classical Antiquity:** Rationality is cultivated through education focused on classical studies, literature, and philosophy. This education sharpens reasoning skills and prepares individuals for responsible civic engagement. Humanists sought to rediscover the literature, philosophy, and art of ancient Greece and Rome. They viewed classical authors such as Cicero, Plato, and Aristotle as models of wisdom, eloquence, and civic virtue.

- **Rationality and objectivity:** Renaissance humanists believed that reason is the defining feature of humanity, enabling individuals to think critically, analyze classical texts, and seek knowledge beyond superstition or blind faith. Rationality was seen as a divine gift that humans could use to shape their moral and intellectual development.
- This principle encouraged scholars to question traditional authorities, both religious and scholastic, and to engage in independent thought and rigorous debate, leading to innovations in philosophy, science, and the arts.

Some Humanist Works

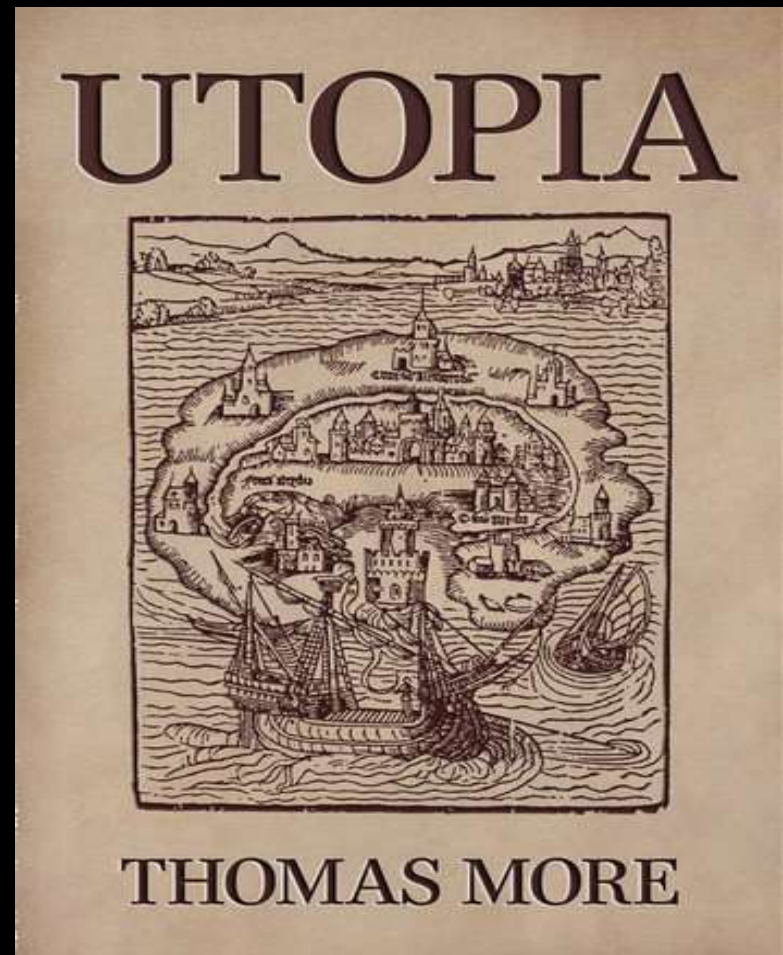
- Michelangelo's "David"
- This marble statue symbolizes individual strength, human potential, and moral virtue, illustrating Renaissance ideals of human form and heroic individuality



- Raphael's "The School of Athens"
Depicts an idealized gathering of classical philosophers and humanists, emphasizing reason, knowledge, and intellectual discourse central to humanist thought.

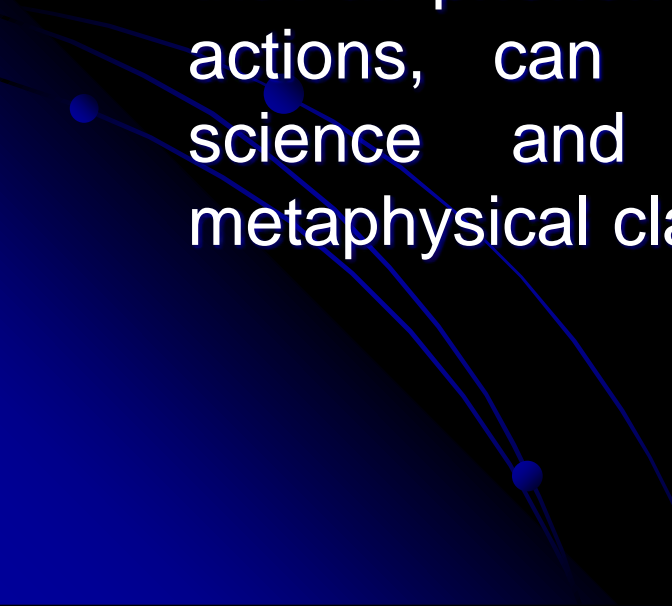


- **Thomas More - Utopia (1516)**
A philosophical work envisioning an ideal society based on justice, education, and common welfare grounded in humanist principles.
- **Niccolò Machiavelli - The Prince (1513)**
A pragmatic political treatise that examined power, leadership, and statecraft, applying humanist ideals to real-world governance and separating morality from political necessity.
- **Erasmus - Praise of Folly (1509)**
A satirical critique of societal and religious follies, advocating for educational reform and spiritual renewal through classical learning and reason.





**Naturalism and its
Contribution to the Age of
Reason**

- **Naturalism** as a philosophy is the view that everything arises from natural causes and processes, excluding supernatural or spiritual explanations. It holds that nature is the ultimate reality, governed by unchangeable natural laws, and that all phenomena, including human thoughts and actions, can be understood through empirical science and observation. Naturalism rejects metaphysical claims.
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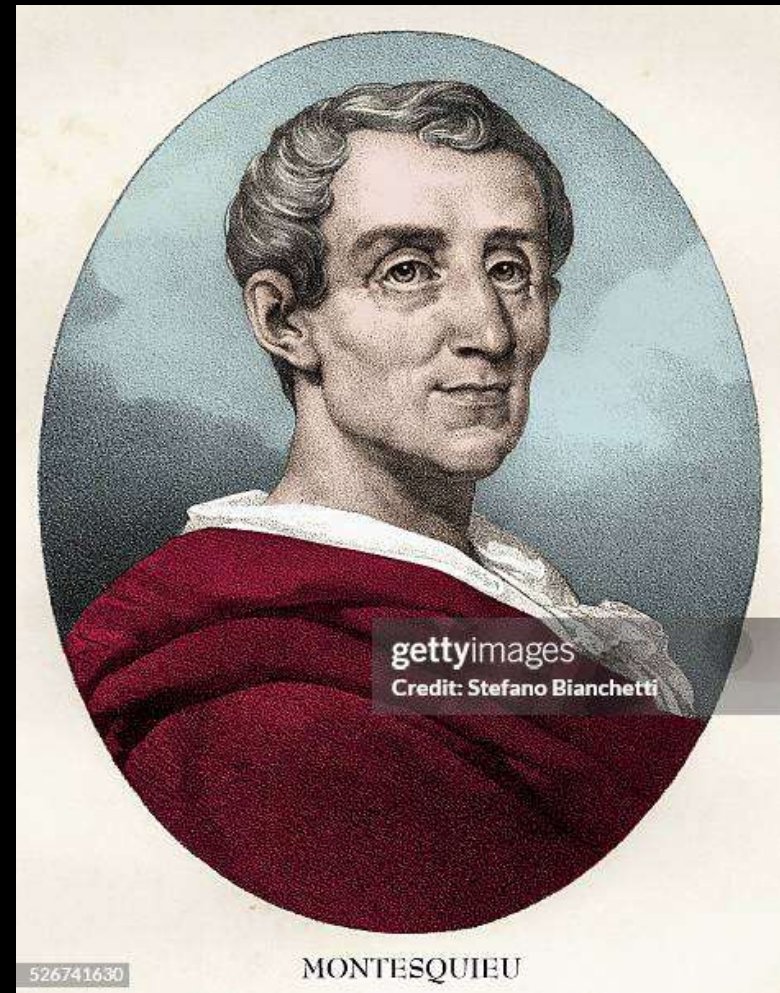
**Major Achievements in Social
Political Thought,
Technology, and Science
during the Age of Reason**

Contributions to Social and Political Thought

- Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Voltaire advanced ideas of **natural rights**, individual liberty, **social contract**, **separation of powers**, and religious tolerance. These ideas challenged monarchical and religious authority and inspired political revolutions (**American and French**) and the development of democratic governments.

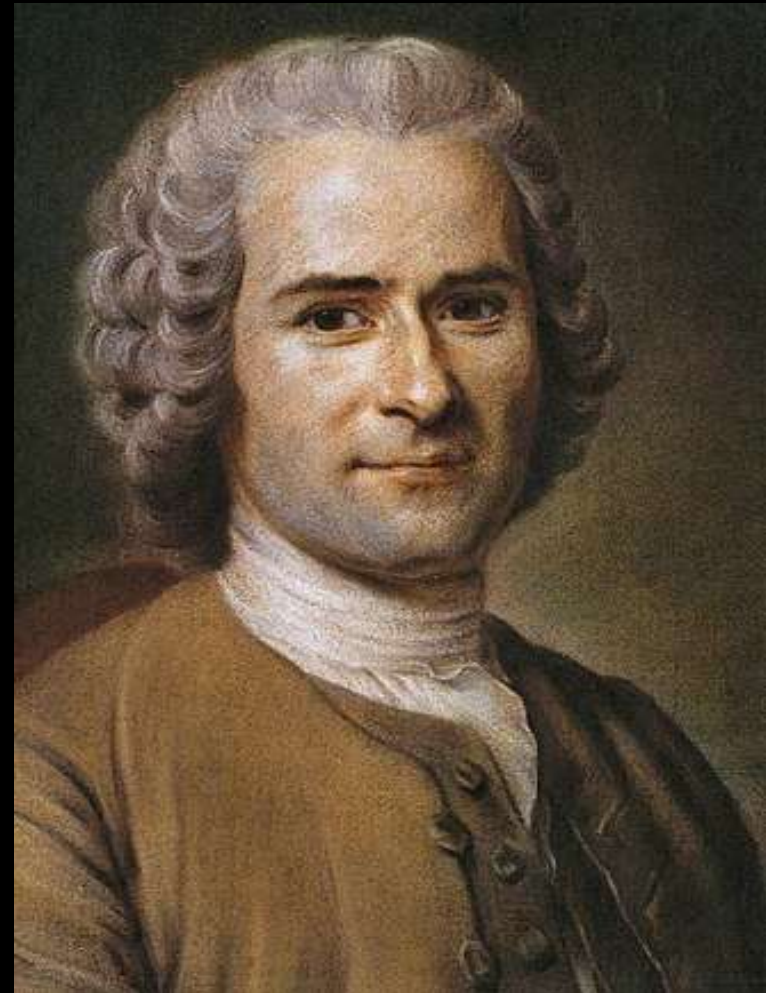
Montesquieu

- **Ideas:** Famous for the theory of separation of powers in government, Montesquieu argued that political authority should be divided into legislative, executive, and judicial branches to prevent tyranny and protect liberty.
- **Major Work:** *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), where he elaborates on comparative politics, government types, and legal principles.



Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)

- **Ideas:** Advocated the concept of the social contract and popular sovereignty, emphasizing direct democracy and the general will as the basis of legitimate political authority. He believed civilization corrupted natural human goodness.
- **Major Work:** *The Social Contract* (1762), a foundation for modern political philosophy on democracy and freedom.



John Locke (1632–1704)

- **Ideas:** Known as the father of liberalism, Locke promoted natural rights—life, liberty, and property—and asserted government legitimacy derives from the consent of the governed. He also advanced empiricism in epistemology.
- **Major Works:** *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), defending government by consent; *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), on human knowledge.



Voltaire (1694–1778)

- **Ideas:** A strong critic of religious intolerance and advocate for freedom of speech, civil liberties, and separation of church and state. His wit and satire attacked superstition and authoritarianism.
- Major **Works:** *Candide* (1759), a satirical novella; numerous letters and essays promoting Enlightenment values



René Descartes (1596–1650)

- **Ideas:** Founder of modern Western philosophy, Descartes emphasized rationalism and the method of doubt. Famous for the cogito argument, "I think, therefore I am," he sought certainty through reason.
- **Major Works:** *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), laying foundations for epistemology and metaphysics; *Discourse on Method* (1637), advancing scientific method.

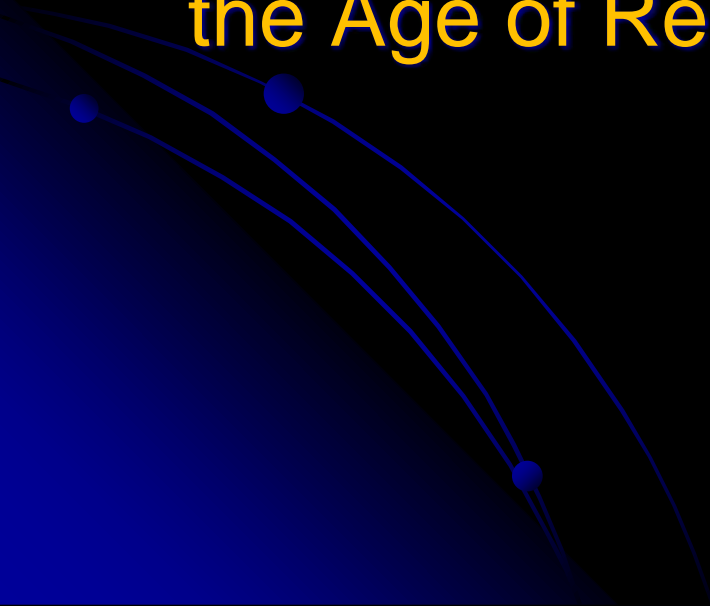


Contributions to Science and Technology

- Inventions including the thermometer, fire extinguisher, sextant, and steam engine emerged, laying foundations for industrial and scientific progress in subsequent centuries.
- Isaac Newton's laws of motion and universal gravitation profoundly transformed understanding of the physical universe.
- Advances in astronomy, physics, and mathematics by Galileo, Kepler, and Newton replaced Aristotelian views with evidence-based theories, changing humanity's view of the cosmos.

- The establishment of the scientific method based on empirical observation and experimentation was refined and popularized by figures like Francis Bacon and René Descartes. Descartes' methodological skepticism and his famous cogito ("I think, therefore I am") laid philosophical groundwork for rational inquiry.

For TD Sessions

- Presentations about:
 - 1. The Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries.
 - 2. The Role of Protestant Reformation in the Age of Reason.
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Thank You !

Messikh Djihad