THE IDEOLOGY OF REVOLUTION

"All may be well; that hope can man sustain, All now is well; tis an illusion vain."

Voltaire (1755)

Introduction

Today's discussion will focus on political philosophy. We will attempt to trace from where revolutionaries in the Americas received inspiration for their quest for independence. By the time we finish this discussion you should be able to do the following:

1. Compare and contrast the Medieval world view with that of the Enlightenment
2. Identify John Locke's key political concepts in his Second Treatise on Government.
3. Explain how the Locke's writings and the doctrine of the Enlightenment aided America's revolutionary cause.

II. A Changing World View

A. The Crumbling of the Universe

1. The Medieval view of the Universe was geocentric and based on the cosmology of Aristotle (384-322 BCE).

   Image 1A32i01: Geocentric

   a. Heavens were eternal and incorruptible, celestial motions were circular while terrestrial motions were up and down.

   b. John Buridan, in the 1300s, explained why earth was static in the following way: "Since local motion heats, and therefore since we and the earth are moved so swiftly, we should be made hot . . . But the last appearance which Aristotle notes is more demonstrative to the question at hand. This is than an arrow projected from a bow upward falls again in the same spot of the earth from which it was projected. This would not be so if the earth were moved with such velocity."

2. By the 16th century a new view of the universe was taking hold. It is referred to as a heliocentric view.

   Image 1A32i02: Heliocentric
a. Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) in *De Revolutionibus* argued that the sun was the center and not the earth.

**Image 1A32i03:** Nicolaus Copernicus

b. What made this new view of the universe possible was "science."

**B. The Search for Truth in an Age of Uncertainty**

1. By the advent of the 17th century, Europeans were having a difficult time figuring out what was certain.

   a. It could no longer be found in religion since now Christianity had so many denominations.

   b. As for past authority (Aristotle), well the move from a geocentric view to a heliocentric view of the universe demonstrated that these sources were not always trustworthy.

   c. Even in philosophy, answers could not be found as René Descartes explains: "I shall say nothing about philosophy, except that, seeing that it has been cultivated by the very best minds which have ever existed over several centuries and that, nevertheless, not one of its problems is not subject to disagreement, and consequently is uncertain."

   **Image 1A32i04:** René Descartes

2. Many were now looking to science as a new source of authority.

   a. It certainly was a new method of acquiring knowledge relying on observation and experimentation.

   b. For example, with scientific method it was possible to uncover laws in nature like gravity.

**C. The Enlightenment**

1. What was the Enlightenment? It was an intellectual movement that had its beginning in England and developed in France. It was influenced by the Scientific Revolution (new source of authority). It contrasted the "irrationality" of the Middle Ages with reason.

   a. Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet in *The Progress of the Human Mind*, identified some of the key doctrines of the Enlightenment. "Our hopes for the future condition of the human race can be subsumed under three important heads: the abolition of inequality
between nations, the progress of equality within each nation, and the true perfection of mankind."

**Image 1A32i05: Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat**

2. Other doctrines of the Enlightenment included the following:

   a. "Man" is by nature rational, and reason enables "man" to behave correctly.

   b. "Man" can progress thus questioning the view that "this is the best of all possible worlds."

   d. "Men" are equal and therefore should have individual liberty and should be equal before the law.

   e. Beliefs are to be accepted on the basis of reason.

3. It brought under scrutiny positions held by philosophers such as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716).

   **Image 1A32i06: Wilhelm Leibniz**

   a. Leibniz argued, "Since all possible things have a claim to existence in God's undertaking in proportion to their perfection's, the result of all these claims must be the most perfect actual world which is possible."

   a. It also allowed for enlightened thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract* (1762) to argue the following: "Man is born free, and is everywhere in chains. From whatever side we approach our principle, we reach the same conclusion, that the social compact sets up among citizens an equality of such a kind, that they all bind themselves to observe the same conditions and should therefore all enjoy the same rights. Thus, from the very nature of the compact, every act of sovereignty, i.e. every authentic act of the general will, binds or favours all the citizens equally; so that the sovereign recognizes only the body of the nation, and draws no distinctions between those whom it is made up"

**III. In Support of Monarchy**

**A. The Robert Filmer: Divine Right**

1. The English Civil (1642-1651) war had set into motion the search for stability. For many, and in particular Restoration royalists, stability could only be insured through royal absolutism. One of England's great champions of patriarchal and
divine-right monarchy was Robert Filmer (1588-1653). Filmer's views on royal absolutism are found in *Patriarcha* (c. 1635-1642) and the *Absolute Power of Kings* (1648).

a. In *Patriarcha* (c. 1635-1642), Filmer argued, "It may seem absurd to maintain that kings now are the fathers of their people, since experience shows the contrary. It is true, all kings be not the natural parents of their subjects, yet they all either are, or are to be reputed as the next heirs to those progenitors who were at first the natural parents of the whole people, and in their right succeed to the exercise of supreme jurisdiction . . . . As long as the first fathers of families lived, the name of patriarchs did aptly belong unto them. But after a few descents, when the true fatherhood itself was extinct, then the title of prince or king was more significant to express the power of him who succeeds only to the right of that fatherhood which his ancestors did naturally enjoy."

b. In *The Necessity of the Absolute Power of Kings* (1648), Filmer explained, "In a well-ordered state, the sovereign power must remain in one only, without communicating any part thereof unto the state. Wise politicians, philosophers, divines and historiographers, have highly commended a monarchy above all commonweals. It is not to please the prince that they hold this opinion, but that for the safety and happiness of the subjects. And contrariwise, when as they shall limit and restrain the sovereign power of monarch, and subject him to the general estates or to council, the sovereignty hath no firm foundation, but they frame a popular confusion or a miserable anarchy, which is the plague of all estates and commonweals . . . ."

B. Thomas Hobbes: State of Nature

1. Along with Filmer, England's second great political theorist of royal absolutism was Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). Hobbes, like Filmer, had witnessed the disorder that struck England during the Civil War. This raised a fundamental question for Hobbes: Do humans have the capacity for self-government? To answer this question, Hobbes first examined what state humankind was in during pre-political conditions (state of nature).

Image 1A32i07: Thomas Hobbes

a. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes argued that, "Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man . . . In such condition there is no place for Industry . . . no Culture of the Earth . . . no Society; an which is worst of all, continual feare, and danger of violant death; And the life of man solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short . . . And because the condition of
Man is a condition of War of every one against everyone... It followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a Right to everything... And therefore, as long as this natural Right of every man to everything endureth, there can be no security to any man...”

Image 1A32i08: Leviathan

b. Hobbes further argued, "Right is layd aside, either by simply Renouncing it; or by Transferring it to another. By Simply RENOUNCING; when he cares not to whom the benefit thereof redoundeth. By TRANSFERRING; when he intendeth the benefit thereof to some certain person, or persons. And when a man hath in either manner abandoned, or granted away his Right; then he is said to be OBLIGED, or BOUND, not to hinder those, to whom such Right is granted."

c. Clearly, Hobbes did not have a positive opinion of humankind in a state of nature. Hobbes believed that order and security could only be obtained through a contract. This contract placed an absolute ruler at the head of government.

III. The Law of Nature and Revolution

A. The Challenger: John Locke (1632-1704)

1. For many historians, John Locke is believed to be the founding thinker of liberalism (civil and political rights). Locke, like Hobbes, was a product of the changing intellectual climate of Europe (science).

Image 1A32i09: John Locke

a. Unlike Hobbes, Locke believed that humans in state of nature were reasonable and lived in a perfect state of freedom.

b. In this state of nature humans possessed certain natural rights. The law of nature governed this state of nature. What is the law of nature?

a. Many argued that natural laws (not positive laws) structured the world and that God had willed these natural laws. Furthermore, many stressed that reason could uncover these natural laws. What did Locke's use of reason uncover about the law of nature? Let us find out.

2. Locke's Two Treatises on Government (p. 1690) was written to justify the English Revolution of 1688 and to challenge the absolutist arguments of patriarchal theory and divine right theory. His Second Treatise on Government holds the answer to what is the law of nature.
a. Locke argued, "To understand political power right and derive it from its original, we must first consider what state all men are naturally in, and that is a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature . . . The state of Nature has a law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions . . . ."

3. Why humans left this state of nature (pre-political condition) and formed government was to enforce observance of our natural rights.

a. Locke believed that when government no longer protected these natural rights, then it was our duty or right to remove it.

b. This argument challenged the assumptions made under patriarchal theory and divine right theory. But more important for us, this theory could be and would be used to challenge the political/economic policies (those Acts) England was trying to enforce on the colonists.

B. Declaring Independence

1. How influential was Locke, natural law theory, and the Enlightenment on revolutionaries? You tell me! Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) is believed to be primary author of the Declaration of Independence. Does it contain traces of natural right theory?

Image 1A32i10: Thomas Jefferson

a. Take a moment and read the following fragment from Declaration of Independence. What influenced the content of this passage?

"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and
organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

2. Although revolution started in the Americas, it did not end there. Throughout the 18th century, France had experienced constant war, crop failures, and challenges from the estate system. To make matters worse, the Third Estate carried the financial burdens of France while the First Estate and the Second Estate enjoyed exemption from the payment of taxes. King Louis XVI's failure to resolve France's woes resulted in coming of revolution in 1789.

  a. Within the same year, the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) was issued and stated that

"1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good. 2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression."

b. Eventually, this revolution turned "radical" with the execution of Louis XVI in 1793.

  Image 1A32i11: Execution of Louis XIV

c. One year later, the French Republic (no longer a monarchy) abolished slavery in its colonies.

3. News of the French revolution quickly reached Saint Domingue (Caribbean) where its slave population eagerly awaited emancipation. When it became evident that Saint Domingue's planters were not going to abolish slavery, a rebellion broke out in 1791.

  a. In 1797, Toussaint L'Overture began to move Saint Domingue away from France. By 1800, L'Overture was at the height of his power and a major obstacle to Napoleon's plans for reasserting France's presence in the Americas. He sent 25,000 troops and eventually captured L'Overture. He died in a French prison.

    Image 1A32i12: Toussaint L'Overture

b. Saint Domingue's independence was achieved in 1804 under the leadership of Jean Jacques Dessalines. Saint Domingue was renamed Haiti (higher place).

c. The Haiti Revolution demonstrated that slaves could be victorious over Europeans!