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HUM 3306: History of Ideas--The Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Anxiety  
Summer 2012

### **ENLIGHTENMENT IDEAS: THE SEQUENCE OF OUR READINGS, LEADING UP TO THE ROMANTIC ERA**

#### 1. Enlightenment science (course sub-theme of "Nature in the Encyclopedia")

- Nature is put at a distance so it can be rationally observed & classified (see Peale museum painting e-text).
- A corollary is that the "self", rather than being deemed corrupted by sin or regenerated by Christ, can be secularly self-engineered, perfected without the need for God's gracious intervention (see Franklin e-text).

#### 2. Enlightenment protection of property (course sub-theme of "Civil Rights ... Possessive Selfhood")

- The erosion of the hierarchical Great Chain of Being plus the development of a science of government lead to egalitarianism and the theory of a natural right to equality and security of self and one's body (Locke).
- Locke is the first ideologue for capitalism, although he himself of course had no concept of capitalism as it would emerge in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the Industrial Revolution or era emerges (i.e. efficient factories).

#### 3. Enlightenment thinkers seek, most fundamentally, freedom (course sub-theme of "The Advancement of Freedom")

- Radical Enlightenment thinkers (Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, for instance) embraced political egalitarianism (exemplified by the French Revolution, even at the cost of potential anarchy), gender emancipation, and the critique of all dogma.
- Read the Paine e-text biography below and then read the first page or so of the first chapter of his famous The Age of Reason (1794-6) in the next e-text. Then read, in the next e-text, the first several paragraphs of the Wiki. entry on Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792).

E-text: Tom Paine--biography

E-text: Tom Paine—read the first page of the first chapter of The Age of Reason

E-text: Mary Wollstonecraft—read just the first several paragraphs

- The Age of Reason or the Enlightenment Age is often called, in literary contexts, the Age of Satire: the rise of satiric/skeptical journalism emerges in this period. Increasingly, the press becomes a means to inform the public and to critique authority. Ben Franklin, a Founding father of the U.S., was trained as a printer and journalist; he first gained fame as a satirist of the U.S. 18<sup>th</sup>-century political scene, right before the U.S. revolted (1776) against perceived British tyranny.

- Paine uses his rationality to puncture superstition and dogma, but it's not always clear what he replaces dogma/authority with. Paine was vilified in his latter days because he seemed to be promoting mob-rule, atheist values (he was a Deist, not an atheist), and so on. Paine doesn't promote particular ideas: what he promotes is every individual's right to think as she/he wishes, without the constraints of authority.

**4. *An amazing intellectual/cultural shift occurs towards the end of the 18h century:*** the endorsement of individual reason and autonomy against dogma turns into an endorsement of pure psychological/spiritual interiority, and we enter into the Romantic Era. Blake, famous Romantic poet, loathes social oppression, but what he hates most is what he calls the "mind-forged manacles"!!! Paradoxically (almost) the drive towards individualism in the 18th century simultaneously fuels social critique and moves us towards a preoccupation with the interiorities of selfhood, detached from concerns about social oppression. To be continued . . . when we study the Romantic Era.