**Lecture 1 : The Age of Enlightenment**

**The Age of Reason**

The **Enlightenment** was an intellectual movement in the eighteenth century that emphasized reason and science, Enlightenment thinkers sought to promote reason over all else. They believed that reason could be used to combat social injustice and create positive change. One of the most famous Enlightenment thinkers, Voltaire, wrote extensively about the need for reason in society. He argued that unreasonable religious beliefs were at the root of much of society’s problems and that free speech is vital to society. His famous quote, “I may disagree with what you say, but will defend ’til death your right to say it” is a testament to the power of reason.

The Enlightenment ultimately gave rise to the French Revolution and The Declaration of the Rights of Man, which sought to overthrow the monarchy and institute a government based on reason and was at the forefront of the United States’ founding fathers when writing the Declaration of Independence and the start of the American Revolution.

Two of the first Enlightenment Philosophers were John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. Locke argued that all people are born with certain inalienable rights, including the basic human rights of life, liberty, and property (also core beliefs sewn into American democracy). He believed that government exists to protect these rights and that citizens have a duty to overthrow a government that fails to do so. Hobbes, on the other hand, believed that humans are naturally selfish and that government is necessary to protect people from each other. He argued that individuals must give up some of their liberty in order to live in peace under a government.

Enlightenment thinkers also had a significant impact on philosophy. In particular, Immanuel Kant’s work was hugely influential. Kant argued that humans are capable of morality and rationality because they possess a “cognitive faculty” which allows them to think about the world in abstract terms. This was a radical idea at the time and helped to pave the way for later philosophical movements such as existentialism and post-modernism.

The Enlightenment was not just a philosophical movement, it also led to advances in science and medicine. People like Isaac Newton, Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Louis Pasteur made groundbreaking discoveries in these fields, which helped to legitimize the Enlightenment through the Scientific Revolution. The Enlightenment ultimately led to the Industrial Revolution, which transformed the world through its advances in technology.

The Enlightenment was a time of great change and progress. It was a time when reason and science began to take precedence over tradition and superstition. Most importantly, Enlightenment thinkers helped to lay the foundation for modern society.