Fostering Enlightenment Coffeehouse Culture in the Present

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Abstract

The Enlightenment was a seventeenth and eighteenth century intellectual movement based on the notions of reason and progress that fundamentally altered human society. The unique, intellectual era gave rise to the public sphere, a realm in which individuals could come together to freely identify and discuss social issues and form critical public opinions of civil and political society. Coffeehouses of the Enlightenment were a spatialized version of this public sphere as they housed and promoted the critical and rational debate that formed public opinion. These unique social institutions were highly representative of the intellectual and social culture of the Enlightenment and greatly augmented social interaction and civic engagement. Through examining and comparing the culture found in Enlightenment coffeehouses and the culture found in modern society, we can determine how to foster “coffeehouse culture” in modern times in order to augment social discourse and civic life. Examining modern culture, it can be seen that the reflective and hypercritical culture found in Enlightenment coffeehouses occurs in pockets of society today but has been greatly diminished, due to a lack of civic participation. The public man, well expressed in Enlightenment coffeehouse culture, has been replaced by the isolated, private man with limited leisure time. In order to create a more rational and progressive society, we need to alter the social and economic situations that lead to the degradation of civic engagement. To augment civic participation, we should increase the amount of active leisure time, promote social and metropolitan lifestyles, and increase the funding and support given to creative and interactive education. Fostering Enlightenment coffeehouse culture in the modern era, while difficult and by no means a perfect solution, should hopefully stimulate a more social and rational society that is inherently interested in its own progress and improvement.
Introduction

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were periods of rampant and significant change in thought and social standards. The scientific renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including notable characters and discoveries such as Francis Bacon, who created the scientific method, and Isaac Newton, who theorized the law of gravitation, fueled the rise of a scientific, progressive, and rational spirit that enthralled society throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Individuals started to become interested in the world around them and explored it through various avenues of scientific study and reasoned observation. These studies not only examined the natural world but also focused a great deal of attention on human society. In particular, the origin of human society and governance was examined and debated, especially in relation to natural, human rights as well as the privileged rights given to the aristocratic and clerical classes. For the first time, faith and traditions were challenged, and the monarchies and church of the time came under interrogation for their actions. Society began to question the concepts and customs it had abided by for so long and wondered how it might improve itself. This drive for change would result in massive cultural, social, political, and ideological upheavals and lead to societal alterations in religious practices, governmental bodies, economic trade, social hierarchy, and education that still impact us today. This foundational and transformative period of change is most commonly referred to as the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment was a unique era, not only for the many innovations and philosophies it engineered, but also for the social and cultural change it stimulated. The time period advocated for a culture of widespread discussion and debate that would be free, open, and inclusive and that would be used to critique social standards and behaviors in a realm of public opinion, known as the public sphere. In this public sphere, individuals could come together to freely identify and
discuss social problems and through this discussion, influence civil and political action. The culture was prevalent throughout society but was most commonly found in emerging social institutions that helped to foster and spread these new social standards. The most famous and influential example of these social institutions was the coffeehouse, which was essentially a hotbed for Enlightenment thought and served as the social home of the era. The social and rational culture found in these coffeehouses nurtured the emerging Enlightenment era and helped to foster and disseminate the innovative ideals of movement, such as universal humanity and inalienable civil rights. These new ideologies would inspire society, radically and permanently transform human culture, and set mankind on the path to modernity.

The social and rational culture of the Enlightenment era, found in institutions such as coffeehouses, was critical for the development of modern society and should be fostered in modern times in order to stimulate further social progress and necessary change. To prove this assertion, this thesis will discuss the most essential concepts of Enlightenment coffeehouse culture and modern society by highlighting and discussing them in three major sections. First, this thesis will address the Enlightenment and will argue for both the most appropriate definition of the word as well as assert that the movement was a fundamentally positive transformation of human culture through its formation of the public sphere. Second, this thesis will discuss the emergence and influence of coffeehouses in western civilization as well as claim that these social institutions served both as the spatialized context of the public sphere as well as the social context of the Enlightenment. Thirdly and lastly, this thesis will analyze Enlightenment coffeehouse culture in relation to the culture of modern society and will discuss both why and how we should foster this enlightened and social culture in the present through transforming social and economic standards.
The Enlightenment: An Age of Reason and the Rise of the Public Sphere

“Sapre aude! ‘Have courage to use your own reason!’—that is the motto of enlightenment.”

-Immanuel Kant

To understand the Enlightenment era, we need to make sure we have an appropriate definition and conception of the era as well as a proper understanding of its role in history. This section will argue that the Enlightenment was a seventeenth and eighteenth century intellectual movement that permanently and positively altered the course of human history. This argument will be carried out in three steps: 1) Provide an accurate and encompassing definition of the Enlightenment as both an era and an act founded on the use of reason, 2) Establish the intellectual era as a fundamental break from the rest of human history, and 3) Describe the movement as a positive cultural evolution.

Defining the Enlightenment and the Public Sphere

The Enlightenment is viewed by many historians as a seventeenth and eighteenth century intellectual movement. Thomas Paine coined the time period the “Age of Reason” as the era was imbued with a new and vibrant spirit of rationality, skepticism, and scientific innovation. It is often seen as a period of time in which a series of debates and intellectual projects worked to redefine society and government so that human affairs were guided by human reason rather than faith and arbitrary authority. This definition views the Enlightenment as a unique historical phenomenon where great thinkers like Locke, Diderot, Rousseau, and Kant helped to redefine

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the individual’s relationship within society and to innovatively root society’s value system in rationality.⁴

However, there are those that would disagree with this definition. There is an ongoing argument in the historic community on the variety of ways to define and interpret the word enlightenment, which greatly depends on whether it is described as an age or an act. The Oxford dictionary defines enlightenment as having a “rationalist and scientific approach to the understanding of human society, the law, education, [and] the economy” as well as developing “new theoretical methods and practical reforms for these areas.”⁵ This definition firmly depicts enlightenment as an act and corresponds with the definition that the eighteenth century philosopher Moses Mendelssohn laid out, arguing that enlightenment is “what someone does, not an age to which one belongs.”⁶ For Mendelssohn, the act of enlightenment encompasses both individual acts as well as societal acts, which are “the effects of the industry and efforts of men to better their social condition.”⁷ There are also those that argue that the Enlightenment was not a closed historical period but an open movement that continues to influence the present, whether that be positively or negatively.⁸ This definition more firmly sees enlightenment as an ongoing process of continual progress and change, rather than a specific time period. Additionally, many historians argue that the definition of enlightenment changes among different individuals as it is experienced differently by different people, especially in terms of gender, race, and class.

Although the interpretations of the word are almost limitless, this thesis bases itself on the idea that the Enlightenment refers to both an act and an age. Enlightenment should be defined

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⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁷ Mendelssohn, “On Enlightening the Mind”.
⁸ Outram, The Enlightenment.
as the process of using innovative and reasoned approaches to examine and reflect on social standards in order to bring about progress. However, it is also a specific era in human history when these new approaches were carried out in society for the first time at a broad and radical scale. This mixed definition can be seen in how the word is capitalized when referring to the time period, due to the influence of historians, and is lower case when referring to the act. However, the idea of the word enlightenment as an act and an age still leaves the option of choosing the best definition(s) that summarize both the process of enlightenment and the time period in which it came to dominate society. While there are many applicable definitions, German philosopher Jürgen Habermas provides the most accurate definition of both the word and the era, one that further advances the Kantian description of Enlightenment.

The Kantian definition of Enlightenment as a process is foundational for all other definitions of the Enlightenment as an intellectual era. In 1784, the philosopher Immanuel Kant responded to the question, “Is it advisable not to further sanctify the bonds of marriage through religion?” with his essay “What is Enlightenment?” in which he tried to define the word. His definition of the word remains one of the best answers to the ongoing debate. Kant’s main argument is that enlightenment is the ability to freely and publicly make use of one’s reason through open public discourse. In Kant’s world, the motto of the enlightenment is to “have courage to make use of your own understanding” and that only through public reasoning can mankind be released from its “self-incurred immaturity.” Man must be free to develop and express his own opinion in a public realm, otherwise all new ideas, innovations, and beliefs would be stifled, and all progress would be halted. Without progress, the enlightenment of society is impossible. Kant’s most famous remark is that if asked, “Do we now live in an

9 Ibid.
10 Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”
enlightened age?’, the answer is ‘No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment.’" For Kant, enlightenment is the never-ending cycle of progress and reflection.

It is based on this definition that German philosopher Jürgen Habermas further builds his own interpretation of the Enlightenment. Habermas extends Kant’s definition of enlightenment by taking Kant’s notion of public discourse and opinion and placing it into an era. Habermas was a liberal German philosopher and political commentator in the 1960s and 1970s who continued the discussion on the Enlightenment brought up by right-wing and reactionary post World War II philosophers. For Habermas, the Enlightenment was a unique time period that saw the widespread acceptance of the inherent value and power of public opinion through the development of the political and social space known as the public sphere. He defined the public sphere as being rooted in civil society and having the ability to form critical, public opinion that criticizes the state’s role in civil society. The public sphere was able to create these criticisms through fostering an atmosphere of free and rational debate, where individuals could exercise and exchange their own ideas and opinions on the fundamental issues of the era. The formalized public opinion that emerged from this discussion could then be used to exert influence against traditional forces, particularly in civil and political spheres. Habermas asserts that the public sphere was truly first created in the Enlightenment as public opinion emerged and flourished during the era due to the spread of cultural and literary materials transmitted by the increasingly educated, consumerist middle class. Habermas revolutionized the idea of the public sphere as he

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11 Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”
14 Habermas, The structural transformation.
made it a descriptive category that has the power to significantly study and analyze specific historical time frames.

In order to have a complete understanding and definition of the public sphere, it is important to understand the two major criticisms against it. First, Habermas’s conception of the public sphere is often criticized for its exclusive limitations, as its participants were usually limited to the propertied and educated, which generally included only males. However, this criticism does not impede the ability of the public sphere to accurately reflect public opinion. One of the major philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment was that of universal humanity, in which all humans are inherently and morally equal as they share the same basic, natural rights. This shared humanity signifies that all individuals have the same innate possibility of becoming educated given the opportunity and resources, regardless of class or wealth. The Enlightenment promoted the society-wide dissemination and transmission of ideas and knowledge through unique social institutions and materials, such as the encyclopedia. This mass spread of information and learning gave individuals the chance of becoming educated, and once educated these individuals could become active participants in civil society. It is this inclusive and edifying mindset of the Enlightenment that gave rise to the public sphere, which grew and solidified as more members of society gained an education and were able to partake in civil discourse. Rather than being exclusive, the public sphere in its very foundation is inclusive and universal. The slow and gradual education of society at large that began during the Enlightenment provided everyone with the means to overcome the restrictions that prohibited entrance to the public sphere. For example, critics argue that women were largely excluded from the public realm. However, while their participation in many social institutions was limited, the
rise in women’s publications and salon discussions illustrates that they still played a major role in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{15}

The second major criticism of Habermas's conception is that it does not address the ability of the public sphere to help shape the social identity of various groups.\textsuperscript{16} For these critics, the public sphere was composed of a variety of micro-publics, such as groups of women and wage laborers, whom could use the realm of public debate and discussion to assert and legitimize their perspectives and identities. However, this view completely invalidates the very ideal of the public sphere as the sphere is a universally accessible realm unaffected by social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{17} This definition means that groups cannot use the public sphere to define and legitimatize their social identities because it does not allow for individual identification and perspectives.\textsuperscript{18} The public sphere expresses the general will and opinion of society at large and, by its very essence, cannot be defined or ruled by private individuals. The public sphere demands rational autonomy: the ability to think and act in purely rational terms and the disavowal of personal interests and social identities.\textsuperscript{19} This rational autonomy means that individuals are stripped of their unique social characteristics upon entering the public realm and are reduced to their most basic human qualities, disregarding social statuses for general equality.

This lack of social identity highlights the abstractness of Habermas’s conception as there has never been and never will be a public sphere that is genuinely universal, for people will always be part of social groups. However, instead of invalidating the concept, the abstract

\textsuperscript{17} Habermas, \textit{The structural transformation}.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}
conception simply emphasizes that the public sphere is an imaginary space that can appear real and, therefore, exert real influence. The public realm is about having social group identity seem invisible in order for the public sphere to appear universal. The formation of this single collective subject, known as the public, is often hard to envision as mass subjects tend to be unstable and inherently collapse back into social groups or worse, mass terror.\(^{20}\) The most commonly used example of this collapse is the French Revolution, in which the public that was said to have taken control was, in reality, merely a faction that claimed to constitute the public through propaganda and an authoritarian use of terror to assert their control.\(^{21}\) However, despite all the criticism, isolated individuals were able to successfully come together as a collective entity—the people—in new public institutions to freely express their opinions without the interference or regulation of corporate or state entities.\(^{22}\) This conception of the people is well depicted in the American Constitution, which preambles with the words “We the people.” The Enlightenment, through the public sphere, helped to emancipate individuals from arbitrary authority and customs and the saw the emergence of a society of rationally autonomous citizens.

*Enlightenment: A Foundational Break in Human History*

There are many views on the Enlightenment, both in terms of its meaning and historical context, and these varying perspectives continue to debate whether or not the Enlightenment served as a positive impact on society. This thesis is founded on the notion that the Enlightenment was a unique, fundamental, and positive break in human history that helped to herald in modernity with the rise of the public sphere.

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\(^{21}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{22}\) Habermas, *The structural transformation.*
The Enlightenment era was one of the two major breaks in human history, the other being the Neolithic Revolution or the move from a hunter-gather society to one based on agriculture. Just as the change to an agrarian civilization revolutionized society through the creation of cities and the beginning of human culture, so too did the Enlightenment transform society. During the Age of Reason, society moved from defending customs and traditions as valid based off of their mere existence to questioning customs, inspiring constant change, and fostering rational autonomy in individuals. Autonomy has been defined many ways, but one of the most accurate and encompassing versions was laid out by the historian Robert Pippin, in which autonomy is:

“The possibility that human beings can regulate and evaluate their beliefs by rational self-reflection, that they can free themselves from interests, passion, traditions, prejudice, and autonomously “rule” their own thoughts, and that they can determine their actions as a result of self-reflection and rational evaluation, an evaluation the conclusions of which ought to bind any rational agent.”

The Enlightenment is seen as historically discontinuous, or a revolutionary break in human history, as mankind seemed to evolve and unmask a hidden quality within themselves which they had not before been able to access. With enlightenment came man’s ability to define and utilize willpower in decision-making, instead of simply conforming to traditions and the status quo. This rise of autonomous individuals triggered a new era of dynamic cultural and social change that permanently and foundationally transformed human civilization.

There are historians that argue that the Enlightenment was just another dot on the timeline and was not a radical break in human history. For them, the time period was politically and socially continuous with past events, and nothing more than local discussion and debate. But in no other time period, excluding the Neolithic Revolution, has there been such a rapid and massive transformation in human life and shift in human culture. The Enlightenment was an all-

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encompassing revolution that transformed society politically, economically, intellectually, culturally, and morally. The Age of Reason saw the emergence of new political and economic orders, such as the rise of nation states and the development of free market economies. The rise of capitalistic culture and commerce created a new commercial market for literature and cultural products, which helped to disseminate Enlightenment ideas across various social classes and give rise to a sphere of public opinion. Additionally, many of the world’s most important cultural institutions developed in this space, including the newspaper, the novel, the lending library, and the coffeehouse. Furthermore, the intellectual movement established the use of reason and scientific facts in human affairs over traditions and myths. The Enlightenment provided an atmosphere that heralded in new ideologies like the scientific method and materialism. The time period also shaped new cultural and social norms, such as the belief in the constant improvability of mankind as well as the insistence in inherent natural rights for all individuals. The influence of these innovative social norms eventually led to the general edification of society, both elite and lower class, as well as to the development of modern civil liberties. The Enlightenment unequivocally laid the path for modernity as the intellectual movement, in its very essence, characterized that human life after the era was “fundamentally better than before.”

Broadly speaking, the Enlightenment was a time of expanding economy, increasing urbanization, improving communication, and evolving culture that transformed society into a profoundly different entity than it had been before.

Enlightenment: The Betrayal of Society or a Positive Break

25 Pippin, Modernism as a Philosophical Problem, 4.
There are many sects of philosophers who argue against the wholly positive historical view of the Enlightenment era. The most famous movement was known as the Counter-Enlightenment, which was very prominent in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, even continuing into the twentieth century with prominent theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Adorno and Horkheimer were post World War II thinkers who reflected on the atrocities that had occurred both in the War and in the Holocaust and how these atrocities were possible in a society that praised itself for its modernity and rationality. The German philosophers admired the Age of Reason as a progressive movement that had the potential to bring about positive social change. However, they argued that at some point along the way, the intellectual movement came into contradiction with itself and became a limiter of progressive social change instead of a driver. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the Enlightenment unknowingly reoriented society to prize calculability and domination and led to the establishment of a highly administrative, modern society in which the formation of concentration camps was possible. In other words, while the Enlightenment has often been positively viewed as the liberation of mankind from fear and the advancement of rational autonomy, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the movement was “betrayed by its own liberating capacity” and therefore disenchanted society and deprived it of humanity.

Adorno and Horkheimer attributed much of the blame of the Enlightenment’s failure to capitalism and the formation of a mass product culture. More specifically, Adorno and Horkheimer stressed that the Enlightenment, accidentally but devastatingly, negatively impacted society when it brought about modernity as the movement led to the formation of a manipulative and deceptive information culture. They believed that the Enlightenment led to a disenchattlement

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26 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment.*
with the world that made it difficult to focus on positive and harmonic human aspirations and that caused the consumerism of information instead of true quests for knowledge. Furthermore, they argued that this lack of a human-centric focus led to the possibility of knowledge only as a commodity, not as truth, and humans only as objects, not as individuals. This change caused the detachment of knowledge and science from practical and meaningful life, which, in turn, further stripped society of its virtuous and humanistic essence by dehumanizing individuals and transforming them into mere statistics.\(^{28}\) Adorno and Horkheimer used this argument to assert that the horrors of the National Socialist terror movement were not an unprecedented aberration in human history but were natural reactions to the negative potentials rooted deep in the very foundations of Western civilization.\(^{29}\)

The German authors especially stressed the detrimental ability of the information culture, through communication media, to cause individual alienation by forcing people to conform.\(^{30}\) For example, they argued that the rise of Hitler and the third Reich was only possible due to his emphasis on rejoicing in the similarities of Germans and expelling those who did not conform to their standards. For Adorno and Horkheimer, communication has the power to free the individual. However, modernity has often used this communication in the form of subtle propaganda, turning language into an instrument that purports the notion that the only decent behavior is that which conforms to social standards. To be different is to be a failure and a sin, and is to be judged and ridiculed by collective society.\(^{31}\) However, even with all of their despair about the negative modern impacts, Adorno and Horkheimer asserted that the Enlightenment inherently had the potential to positively impact and free society. Furthermore, they claimed that

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
\(^{29}\) Ibid.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 183.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 22.
it was the rise of certain social and consumeristic institutions that caused the movement to betray itself and society to develop for the worse. Even Habermas believed that the rise of certain social institutions, such as mass media, fundamentally transformed Enlightenment society and led to the decline of the public sphere.

Both Habermas, and Adorno and Horkheimer, agreed that the Enlightenment was a progressive era—full of potential good—that led to an information revolution in which the increasingly universal access to information and news became a big commercial business. However, the disagreement lies on whether or not this commodification of culture was realistically a positive or negative turn for society. Both sides present convincing arguments, but Habermas presents the most believable one as it is the argument most in tune and in accordance with present-day ideals in Western civilization. While society acknowledges and debates on the potential degradation of knowledge by rampant consumerism and pandering to the masses, most of us can agree that we believe that universal education and the ability to individually learn and search for the truth should be an inherent human right. The information revolution caused by the Enlightenment helped to provide for this right. In Habermas’s perspective we can identify an Enlightenment that matches our own beliefs on the importance of social discourse and communication for the edification and betterment of society, regardless of potential negative impacts. However, more important than what Habermas, and Adorno and Horkheimer, depart on is what the philosophers agree on. Both sides similarly point out the decline of the Enlightenment, as well as the public sphere and culture it fostered, in relation to the rise of certain, transformative social institutions and customs. While innovative social and economic conditions, such as the formation of a powerful, middle class, helped give rise to the Enlightenment, the conditions also led to the decline of the movement when the transformation
and development of these environmental conditions began limiting instead of encouraging the movement. The decline of the intellectual era, especially in regards to the public sphere and social institutions it was predominately found in, will be discussed more later on in the paper.

The Enlightenment was a transformative era as it served as a fundamental switch in human history, helping to develop a rationally, autonomous society. This autonomy allowed individuals to rationally think and decide for themselves and to use this reason to reflect on society and try to change it for the better. Individuals started to use their power of reason in social discourse, and from these conversations grew a force to be reckoned with: public opinion. Habermas’s definition of the Enlightenment relies on the idea that a public sphere, or a court of influential public opinion, emerged during this time period. The concept of this public sphere, and its role in shaping society, must be properly understood in order to have a true conception of the Enlightenment and how it could have positively transformed human culture and brought about modern society. The rise of the public sphere provided the environment necessary for the further development and transmission of Enlightenment ideals. While the public sphere is an abstract conception of public opinion that seems unable to further these ideals, it was able to do so through its realization in Enlightenment coffeehouses. The seventeenth and eighteenth century coffeehouses were unique social institutions that represented a spatialized version of the public sphere. In these institutions, there was critical and rational debate over a variety of social issues, including emerging Enlightenment ideals.

Coffeehouses: The Social Home of the Enlightenment
“The history of coffee houses, ere, the invention of clubs, was that of the manners, the morals and the politics of a people.”

- D’Israeli

The introduction of coffee to western civilization arguably changed the course of history in the region, especially that of the blossoming English nation. With the introduction of coffee came the opening of coffeehouses to serve the sweet black nectar. These coffeehouses spread rapidly throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and came to hold a prevalent place in western society. Coffeehouses became especially prominent in England, where English café society was a common place to discuss innovative ideas, gossip about current events, or simply relax. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on English coffeehouse life and society, due to the detailed primary and secondary sources available and its model role as a home of public discussion and opinion. This section will argue that the intense public discourse and debate that occurred in coffeehouses between members of different social classes broadly expanded the newly forming sphere of public opinion and contributed to the formation and entrenchment of democratic ideals and civil liberties in modern society. This argument will be carried out in six steps: 1) Give an account of the entrance of coffee to western society and its importance, 2) Provide an introduction to coffeehouses and a description of the many innovations that occurred there, 3) Explain the significance of the spatialized version of the public sphere found in the coffeehouse, 4) Contend that coffeehouses were not hotbeds of sedition but instead were similar to universities in their educative abilities, 5) Claim that coffeehouses served as the social context of the Enlightenment and 6) Maintain that coffeehouses were not an over romanticized ideal and describe their real contribution to the formation of a more progressive society.

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32 D’Israeli, I. Curiosities of Literature (London, 1798), 345.
Coffee

Coffee, or the “wine of Islam”, was introduced to Europe in the sixteenth century by way of trade with Turkey as European explorers that encountered the Islamic enthusiasm with the black nectar returned quickly with stories and samples of the drink.\(^{33}\) Coffee came to heavily dominate European society so that within less than half a century, “bread itself, though commonly with us voted the staff of life, is scarcely of so universal use.”\(^{34}\) It was estimated that by 1680, throughout England alone, 100 tons of coffee were consumed annually.\(^{35}\) The composer Bach alongside the poet Picander even constructed a “Coffee Cantata” in 1732, celebrating the drink with lines such as “Ah! How sweet coffee tastes! Lovelier than a thousand kisses, sweeter far than muscatel wine!” and “[We] can’t live without coffee! We’ll all soon be dead!”\(^{36}\)

Drinking water during this time period was untreated and often considered unsafe to imbibe. Men and women, worried about the negative effects, tended to drink alcohol, especially beer, in exchange for water. The introduction of coffee to society provided a beverage that had the safety from high bacteria and disease levels that alcohol provided without the mental impairment. The spread of coffee, and therefore the integration of caffeine into everyday social habits, energized society and increased its overall productivity. Coffee was also praised to help the overall health of individuals by quickening circulation, lowering inebriation levels, and

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\(^{35}\) *An Answer to a Paper Set Forth by the Coffee-Men Directed to the Honourable, the Commons in Parliament Assembled: Being Reflections Upon Some Propositions That Were Exhibited to the Parliament for the Changing the Excise of Coffee, Tea, and Chocolate Into a Custom Upon the Commodities* (London: s.n., 1680).

increasing attentiveness and creativity. More radical praises was its ability to cure scurvy, dispel kidney stones, purify the blood, and even prolong life.\(^{37}\)

However, coffee was also often viewed as a danger to the health and well-being of society. Physicians, such as Coulomb, argued that because coffee had a strong influence on blood circulation, it caused general exhaustion, impotence, and emaciation.\(^{38}\) Other physicians, such as Dr. Duncan, argued against the excessive consumption of all hot liquors, including coffee, due to dangers they posed for body circulation. Arguments such as these continue on to the modern day. Today, the focus is on the negative aspects of too much caffeine and our addiction to the drink. But in the words of seventeenth and eighteenth century French philosopher Bernard Le Bovier de Fontanelle, “se le café est un poison, c’est un poison lent” (If coffee is a poison, it is a slow poison).\(^{39}\)

Furthermore, the psycho-pharmacology of coffee as a think drink was a propounded notion of the time.\(^{40}\) Coffee was exclaimed by French historian Michelet in the seventeenth century to be an “elixir of mental clarity” as it helped to give the energy and alertness necessary to help men think and work for longer hours with greater clarity.\(^{41}\) In an era that saw the rise of the modern industrial and capitalist society, there was little patience for alcoholic inebriation, and there was a need for a drink that promoted the productivity so highly prized in a consumer-based society. Beer made individuals loud, rowdy, and disruptive, while coffee made them intense, talkative, and productive.\(^{42}\) In addition, the improvement in chronometric standardization occurred around the same time as the popularization of caffeine, making large

\(^{42}\) Markman Ellis, *Coffee House*. 

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scale economic endeavors and social scheduling possible. In effect, the combination of the clock and coffee was an essential part of modernization.

While coffee was an undeniable force in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, tea was another powerful and prevalent beverage. The Dutch East India Company introduced western civilization to tea by the early seventeenth century at the latest. Tea also contained the essential factor of coffee—caffeine—that was purported to have positive health and productivity benefits, although the drink had less concentrated amounts. Both coffee and tea were widely represented in European seventeenth and eighteenth century society. However, they represented two largely divergent and dualistic forms of caffeine. Coffee was viewed as male, boisterous, passionate, loquacious, aggressive, and energizing. Tea, on the other hand, was associated as female, conventional, virtuous, reticent, and tranquil and was served in teahouses that embodied these qualities. While coffee and coffeehouses were frequently subjected to bans, tea never faced such accusations of immorality. The paradoxical duality of the drinks may have furthered translated to social differences in who imbibed which form and who participated in coffeehouse and teahouse society, particularly in terms of gender.

Besides tea, chocolate provided competition to coffee as a caffeinated beverage. Chocolate drinking was very popular between the years 1675 and 1725. The introduction of cacao to Europe was first documented in 1544 by a Spanish delegation to the King and did not spread to another European country until 1606. It was served in many forms, including in a paste and a drink. The chocolate beverage captivated Europe, especially Spain. However, by the

44 Weinberg and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine*, 64.
45 Weinberg and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine*, 130.
46 Ibid., 130.
year 1750, the drink had become rare, and while chocolate continued to hold a prevalent place in society, it was served alongside coffee and not in competition to the drink.

Within England, as within other European countries, government restrictions and tariffs played a major role in which caffeinated beverage was most widely spread at different times. The fluctuation in duty charges often impacted which drink—coffee, tea, or cacao—played the role of leading lady in society.\textsuperscript{49} However, in the year 1680, when coffee was consumed at 100 tons a year, or approximately 224,000 pounds, tea was used at a rate of 17,000 pounds a year, and chocolate only 6,000 pounds a year.\textsuperscript{50} At least in the last half of the seventeenth century, the early era of the Enlightenment, coffee was king.

The rapid spread of coffee and its prevalent place in society led to the establishment of coffeehouses throughout European society so that individuals could easily and cheaply get their daily fix. These establishments sold a variety of products, including tea, chocolate, and often beer, but no product sold as well as coffee. The drink took hold of society and interestingly became known as the drink of democracy, due to its hand-in-hand relationship with the spread of democratic rights and the formation of commonwealths, especially through the coffeehouse establishments.

\textit{Coffeehouses: Introduction, Innovations, and Institutions}

\textsuperscript{49} Weinberg and Bealer, \textit{The World of Caffeine}, 59.  
\textsuperscript{50} An \textit{Answer to a Paper Set Forth by the Coffee-Men}.  

The first coffeehouse in Europe is said to have been opened in St. Michael’s Alley of London by Mr. Daniel Edwards and Pasqua Rosee around the year 1652. A preponderance of the evidence backs this London scenario, including the owners’ names and an original handbill advertisement for the coffeehouse, now in the British Museum, advertising “The Vertue of the COFFEE Drink First publiquely made and sold in England, by Pasqua Rosee…in St Micheal’s Alley in Cornhill…at the Signe of his own Head.” Regardless of the origin, by the year 1670, it was said that “all the neighborhood swarm[ed to the coffeehouses] like bees and buzz[ed] there like them too.” Coffeehouses began to open across Europe and North America during the second half of the seventeenth century, including establishments in the Netherlands, France, Austria, Italy, and the Americas. However, none gained such a following and reputation as the early coffeehouses in England, especially within the city of London.

The rise of coffeehouses starting in the 1650s gave rise to a unique social institution that brought about radical innovations and inventions. Coffeehouses contributed to many literary, philosophical, and scientific pursuits in metropolitan society. Many of the world’s most important cultural institutions developed in this space, such as the newspaper, the novel, and the lending library. Coffeehouses were the home of emerging financial institutions and served as prototypes for the stock exchange and insurance companies, shown by Lloyd’s Coffee House which became Lloyd’s Stock Exchange, still in existence today. The first ballot box was

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51 Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses: An Exact History of all the Writers and Bishops who have had their Education in the most ancient and famous University of Oxford from the Fifteenth Year of King Henry the Seventh Dom. 1500 to the end of the Year 1690* (London: s.n., 1692).
52 Weinberg and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine*.
created and used in Miles’s Coffee House in England at a Harrington’s Rota Coffee Club meeting, which had James Harrington and John Milton among its count.\textsuperscript{57}

Coffeehouses were also the home of coffeehouse clubs, which helped further educational pursuits. A coffee club formed by Oxford students and scientists at a local coffeehouse was the foundation of one of the leading scientific organization in the world: The Royal Society of London. Founding participants included “Hans Sloane, founder of the British Museum, Sir Edmund Halley, the great astronomer, and Sir Isaac Newton, originator of the calculus, celestial mechanics, and the postulates of classical physics.”\textsuperscript{58} They were said to have performed fantastical scientific experiments in front of coffeehouse audiences, including the dissection of a dolphin on a Garraway’s coffeehouse table done by Robert Hooke and Edward Tyson.\textsuperscript{59} This “Invisible College,” dubbed by chemist Sir Robert Boyle, finally obtained a charter from King Charles II in 1662 to be known as the Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge.\textsuperscript{60}

\textbf{The Coffeehouse Public Sphere}

The coffeehouse of the Enlightenment served as a practical setting for the abstract public sphere. In Habermas’s words, “the bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people coming together as a public.”\textsuperscript{61} Coffeehouses were institutions, created from bourgeois consumerism, which provided a social space for the main purpose of a public sphere: people’s public use of reason.\textsuperscript{62} The relationship between the coffeehouse and the public sphere was that the kind of activity that went on in a public sphere happened in a coffeehouse.

\textsuperscript{57} William Ukers, \textit{All about Coffee} (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2009), 55.
\textsuperscript{58} Weinberg and Bealer, \textit{The World of Caffeine}, 153.
\textsuperscript{59} Markman Ellis, \textit{Coffee House}.
\textsuperscript{60} Weinberg and Bealer, \textit{The World of Caffeine}, 155.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, 38.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.}, 27-52.
However, the coffeehouse was only a representation of the public sphere as a public sphere is not geographical but ideological.

Coffeehouses were designed as open and public spaces that had long, common tables in the middle of the room for individuals seeking conversation partners; they also had boxes laid out along the wall for more private gatherings. The establishments had a distinctive urbane sociability, which fostered egalitarian and congenial conversation. These coffeehouses fostered freedom of expression and speech, although this freedom could be regulated as the space was a division between both the public and private space. However, for the most part, individuals could express their private opinions and ideologies in coffeehouses without it reflecting on their public reputation. Furthermore, coffeehouses substantially influenced the discussion and transformation of public opinion through the flow of cultural materials and social structures. Coffeehouse discussion was a fair way of collecting the natural currency of opinion. Thomas Paine expressed this ability of coffeehouse discussion in the Rights of Man, in which he stated:

> “I have gone into coffee-houses, and places where I was unknown, on purpose to learn the currency of opinion, and I never yet saw any company of twelve men that condemned the book: but I have often found a greater number than twelve approving it, and I think this is a fair way of collecting the natural currency of opinion.”

Coffeehouses represented public opinion because they embraced a variety of perspectives, including individuals from different social classes, professions, and political and moral ideologies. They managed to collect and express this public opinion through constructive discussion as the coffeehouse provided a setting where individuals could freely speak their mind as long as they were rational and concise. Most importantly, coffeehouses fostered critical,

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rational debate on political and social topics on the foundation of an informal set of rules that controlled the social space and regulated debate. These informal rules were captured in the satirical broadsheet poem, “Rules and Orders of the Coffee House”, which was published and displayed on the walls of numerous London coffeehouses in 1674. The pamphlet lightheartedly laid out the rules of discussion within the coffeehouse. The following prose is an excerpt of the rules:

“Enter, Sirs, freely, but first, if you please, Peruse our civil orders, which are these. First, gentry, tradesmen, all are welcome hither, And may without affront sit down together: Pre-eminence of place none here should mind, But take the next fit seat that he can find: Nor need any, if finer persons come. Rise up to assigne to them his room; To limit men’s expence, we think not fair, But let him forfeit twelve-pence that shall swear; He that shall any quarrel here begin, Shall give each man a dish t’ atone the sin: And so shall he, whose compliments extend So far to drink in coffee to his friend; Let noise of loud disputes be quite forbone, No maudlin lovers here in corners mourn, But all be brisk and talk, but not too much, On sacred things, let none presume to touch. Nor profane Scripture, nor sawcily wrong Affairs of state with an irreverent tongue: Let mirth be innocent, and each man see That all his jests without reflection be; To keep the house more quiet and from blame, We banish hence cards, dice, and every game; Nor can allow wagers, that exceed Five shillings, which ofttimes much trouble breed; Let all that’s lost or forfeited be spent In such good liquor as the house doth vent. And customers endeavor, to their powers, For to observe still, seasonable hours. Lastly, let each man what he calls for pay, And so you’re welcome to come every day.”

In reality, there were no formal regulations governing the coffeehouse, and the lyrical rules served merely as a satire on the notion that behavior in coffeehouses could be regulated. However, the ironic rules actually reveal quite a bit about coffeehouse life and debate. Men could indeed freely exchange views, first on literary topics and later on politics and public affairs, although that often led governments to see them as homes of sedition and treason. The poem also accurately hints at the general lack of women found in coffeehouses by addressing solely the sirs and not the madams. Furthermore, the poem highlights the distinct lack of social

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69 A Brief Description of the Excellence Vertues of that Sober and wholesome Drink, called Coffee, and its Incomparable Effects in Preventing or Curing Most Diseases incident to Humane Bodies (London:, Printed for Paul Greenwood, 1673).
rank within coffeehouses, which is arguably valid as the better argument and not social hierarchy won a conversation. However, while there were no formal regulations governing coffeehouse discussion, there were a set of informal and implicit rules that all customers were presumed to follow once entering the establishment.

In his work on coffeehouses, Markman Ellis, a professor of eighteenth century studies, outlined twelve basic principles that informally regulated coffeehouse culture. One of the principles stated that the coffeehouse was open to all customers, who were considered equal within the institution, without discrimination based on social hierarchy. Furthermore, all opinions were to be heard through an unregulated and open discussion although the debate should be “rational, critical, skeptical, polite, calm, and reasoned.” Lastly, arguments should be over a topic of public concern and individuals should concede when faced with a superior argument. These rules were unstated but omnipresent. These informal regulations were commonly held within coffeehouses in order to promote constructive sociability and useful conversation, and, for the most part, they were highly successful. Coffeehouse debate flourished and the coffeehouse was known as a place where a man could go for enlightened debate. These informal structures for open discussion are a necessity for constructive and productive conversation and should always be promoted in debates when possible.

_Coffeehouses: Seminaries of Sedition or Penny Universities_

Coffeehouses were often viewed as a threat to political and social stability as the heated arguments that occurred under their roofs were seen as seeds of sin, sedition, and rebellion. The Netherlands was the only major European nation which never had a caffeine temperance

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72 Markman Ellis, _Coffee House_, 160.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
movement, a prohibition against coffee or tea, or an attack on the coffeehouse.75 A famous comedic joke of the era emphasized these fears: “In a coffee house just now among the rabble, I bluntly asked, which is the treason table?”76 In particular, in London under the rule of the Stuarts, men of lower classes, who had usually been deemed by the government to have no right to discuss public affairs, freely and openly discussed political ideologies and commented on the state of affairs. The Marquis of Newcastle was said to have warned King Charles II upon his restoration that he should restrict the availability and circulation of the news as “every man is now a state man.”77 In response to this situation, King Charles II of England banned coffeehouses with a national proclamation in 1675.78 The monarch feared that coffeehouses were a breeding ground for political and social unrest, and he tried to restrain the “licentious talking of state and government” with a national edict. Loud and veracious protest from coffeehouse owners and coffee drinkers emerged, and the proclamation was revoked after 11 days due to “princely consideration and royal compassion.” Rulers could not contain the emerging power of a society addicted to coffee and coffeehouse life. While coffeehouses played an undeniable role in the growth of English liberty and democratization, they served more as a place where honest political opinions and news were exchanged among social classes than as breeding grounds of treason. Coffeehouses were also an important part of the growing merchant economy as they served as the focal point for meetings and discussions of economic affairs. This role was especially important at a time when few merchants had their own office and when there were few other reputable establishments to discuss commerce. Furthermore, many coffeehouses made special arrangements to receive news on shipping trade and vessels and on the latest economic

76 Christopher Marlowe, Prologue to a Comedy (London: 1681).
78 D’Israeli, I. Curiosities of Literature, 379-380.
ventures, particularly Edward Lloyd’s coffeehouse, which was later to transform into the renowned Lloyd’s insurance institution.\textsuperscript{79}

While political arguments were prevalent in the coffeehouse, there was also rigorous discussion on the topics of commerce, literature, science, and news from abroad. Coffeehouses served less as “seminaries of sedition” and more as institutions of discussion and learning. However, many historians as well as men of the time argued that coffeehouses were not homes of rational debate but were instead homes of “Coffee-house politicians” and social miscreants.\textsuperscript{80} A question raised by Oxford academic Anthony Wood during the time period was: “Why doth solid and serious learning decline, and few or none follow it now in the university?”\textsuperscript{81} For many, the answer was coffeehouses. They believed that the establishments deteriorated society and learning, as men gathered and spent all their time at coffeehouses instead of at university or at work. However, the majority view on coffeehouses, at the time and more modernly, is more optimistic and envisions the coffeehouse more in common with social institutions such as universities than with places like taverns. Coffeehouses were often called “Penny Universities,” as the cost of coffee—a penny—allowed entrance into an institution of diverse learning, whether it be discussing the news, viewing scientific experiments, listening to an academic lecture, or perusing the latest newspapers and literary works available.\textsuperscript{82} Coffeehouses were not homes of social miscreants and reprobates but instead workshops of philosophers, scientists, and men of value.

Attacks on coffeehouses did not only come from the government. Many women of the time as well as the Church of England crafted various pamphlets attacking coffeehouses, which

\textsuperscript{82} Aytoun Ellis, \textit{Penny Universities}.
they saw as dens or gateways to moral sedition and sin. Women asserted that coffeehouses lured their husbands and sons away from their everyday tasks to engage in useless and unfruitful conversation with strangers. Coffeehouses excluded most women unless they helped run the establishment or were from a particular high social strata, so the institutions were said to create the plight of the “coffeehouse widow.” These feelings of discontent led a group of English women to publish a pamphlet in 1674 known as “The Women’s Petition against Coffee, representing to public consideration the grand inconveniences accruing to their sex from the excessive use of the drying and enfeebling Liquor.” In the pamphlet, desolate wives decried the establishment of coffeehouses in their neighborhoods and the serving of that “unhappy berry,” declaring that since the arrival of coffee, “the offspring of our mighty forefathers are on the way to disappear as if they were monkeys and swine.” However, while many women opposed the coffeehouse, many more thought them agreeable or simply did not care. For most women, coffeehouses were a far cry better than taverns, brothels, or other similar institutions of debauchery and inebriation. Furthermore, in relation to their exclusion, while men attended the rough and ready coffeehouses, women were common patrons of the decorous and traditional teahouses, where a different and more restrained manner of sociality occurred. Other than teahouses, feminine sociality tended to occur more commonly in the home, such as in salons and parlors. Women discussed less with strangers and more with acquaintances and friends by traveling between houses. However, that did not mean that emerging ideas and literary works could not spread between different feminine social circles. The reading revolution and

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83 Aytoun Ellis, *Penny Universities.*
84 Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee.*
85 Weinberg and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine.*
86 Ibid.
emergence of letter writing was vital for women, and they often discussed their views on the
news and works of the day through pen or in sitting rooms.

_Coffeehouses: The Social Context of the Enlightenment_

Coffeehouses were the social institutions in which Enlightenment ideas, through debate
and discussion, were produced, received, and marketed.\(^87\) Broadly speaking, coffeehouses served
as the social context of the Enlightenment. They did so by helping to foster democratic notions
of civil rights like social equality and freedom of speech and press. Furthermore, coffeehouses
were the common haunt of notable Enlightenment thinkers, including the coffee-addicted
Voltaire as well as Rousseau, Diderot, and d’Alembert.\(^88\) In these halls, many philosophers of the
Age of Reason brainstormed, discussed, and wrote their now famous works. However,
coffeehouses were widely patronized in Restoration England by a variety of social classes as the
institutions disregarded notions of status.\(^89\) Members of lower classes could be exposed to the
same ideas as the elite, which led to a new form of social equality in terms of education and the
ability to become learned. Everyone who could afford a cup of coffee could enter the
coffeehouse where they could hear the same lecture, read the same book, and drink the same
beverage. The variety of patrons as well as the ever increasing innovative and radical subjects
discussed within the walls of the coffeehouse helped to develop and spread Enlightenment ideals.

Within the establishments themselves, coffeehouses relied on freedom of speech, press,
and assembly and helped spread these ideals throughout civil society. A new form of sociability
developed in response to the freedom of speech promoted in coffeehouses, and informal rules of
discussion developed. Social status or power did not win one an argument as the “better

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\(^87\) Outram, _The Enlightenment_.
\(^88\) Weinberg and Bealer, _The World of Caffeine_, 74.
argument” could assert itself against the social hierarchy and win the conversation. The spreading common interest in Enlightenment ideals helped to establish coffeehouses that were able to foster “a new interplay between manufacturers, men of science, and local intellectuals” and that were able to temporarily set aside distinctions among members to pursue and discuss Enlightenment ideas.

Outside the establishments, the promotion of literature and subsequent increase in literacy, fueled by the coffeehouse and the widespread use of vernacular language, supported the penetration of ideas to both genders and different social strata. The Enlightenment fueled a reading revolution that spread familiarity with the printed word. In addition to the literary works of great philosophers, there were also a group of relatively unknown but professional writers. While the great thinkers were usually read by the elite class, the popular class tended to read this less known group, who were often referred to as the Grub Street writers, especially in institutions like coffeehouses. The Enlightenment also saw the rise of the novel, which conveyed educational and often controversial information while also weaving an intricate story that captured the imagination and interest of its readers. However, one of the most important works was the creation of the Encyclopédie in 1751 by Denis Diderot. The “interrelation of all knowledge” helped to spread a massive amount of information throughout society and presented the opportunity for any individual to educate themselves. Education was the first step on becoming an active member of civic life, and the dispersal of the Encyclopédie, in part made

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90 Habermas, The structural transformation.
91 Outram, The Enlightenment.
92 Markman Ellis, Coffee-House Libraries.
94 Margaret Jacob, ed., The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001), 54.
possible by coffeehouse sociality, helped with the edification of society and created a more representative and participative culture.

Coffeehouses also played a more direct role in fueling the reading and learning revolution and spreading Enlightenment ideals. Cheap commercial lending libraries formed within coffeehouses, and the establishments also offered the latest newspapers, journals, and pamphlets. The news industry, which was created through the rise of bourgeois trade and the spread of information through business pathways, had a strong foundation in coffeehouses. The infamous periodicals, *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* by Addison and Steele, emerged in coffeehouses, and both depicted scenes from life in the establishments as well as promoted a global exchange of ideas. Modern western civilization is centered on the ideals of democracy, capitalism, and civil liberties, notions which were all promoted and disseminated in coffeehouses and by coffeehouse creations. The establishments were so foundational to the Enlightenment movement, to literary culture, and to the development of western society as we know it today that it is hard to imagine how the era would have advanced without them.

*w* **Coffeehouses: Real or an Over Romanticized Ideal**

There are some historians that disagree with the notion that the coffeehouse served as the social context of the Enlightenment and assert that the establishments were not bastions of free speech and assumed equality. The historian Richard Sennett declares that coffeehouses are over-idealized and romanticized because no more than a handful came even close to the purported ideal. He argues that, in contrast to being socially inclusive homes of open and rational

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96 Habermas, *The structural transformation*.
discourse between various social classes and personages, they were socially exclusive institutions that stifled freedom of speech and lacked social, gender, and economic diversity. Furthermore, Sennett argues that they failed to actualize a public sphere and were not able to represent a powerful and representative public opinion.

In regards to free speech, there were, in truth, many attempts at stifling the freedom of speech and press within coffeehouses, especially upon the restoration of the monarchy and ascent of Charles II to the throne of England. However, these attempts were fought by the owners and patrons of the coffeehouses as illustrated by the protest against Charles II’s ban on coffeehouses and its subsequent repeal. Furthermore, freedom of speech has been under attack throughout human history and continues to be contested to this very day. It is during the Enlightenment that freedom of speech truly emerged as an inherent human right, and the practice and defense of natural freedoms within coffeehouses illustrated the rising public acceptance of these beliefs. Coffeehouses served as a space where freedom of speech was accepted as an inherent right, even before the rest of society viewed it as a natural right and constitutionalized it.

In regards to the claims of exclusivity, the common argument against the coffeehouse and its version of the public sphere is that the institutions were limited to the metropolis, were gender and class exclusive, and were defended and patronized solely by Whig ideologues. Historians argue that there was a general lack of rustic Englishmen and women in the coffeehouse, or women at all, and while different social classes were allowed entrance, the institutions were predominately visited by upper and middle class men. Many viewed the establishment of the

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99 Pincus, “Coffee Politicians.”
public sphere in coffeehouses, not as a universal movement, but instead an elite and socially exclusive response to the radical social and political revolutions occurring at the time.\textsuperscript{101} Many of these theorists go a step further and argue that despite the notions of the general universalism of the movement, the Enlightenment devoted as much energy to defining social groups of those unable to partake in rational discussion and the formation of public opinion as it did in attempting to further social progress.\textsuperscript{102} It is impossible to fully discredit these claims as most are at least partially valid. Women were excluded from most coffeehouses and could more commonly be found in teahouses and salons. Most coffeehouses were in major cities, particularly London, and not in the country.\textsuperscript{103} Therefore, only those who lived in the city, generally wealthier and of a higher social status, could visit the coffeehouses and partake in the social discourse. The more liberal minded sought out the establishments as the culture found within them appealed more to their tastes and interests, meaning that some more conservative opinions were left out of the coffeehouse debate.

However, while all these claims have valid roots, they do not discredit or invalidate the notion of the coffeehouse as a generally universal and open environment that fostered free social discourse and learning throughout society and helped to form representative concepts of public opinion. While the Bourgeois Public Sphere found in coffeehouses was disproportionally middle class, white males, it understood itself as being universally accessible. This mindset was a fundamental change from those societies and institutions which came with inherent and strictly enforced limits on social class and gender.\textsuperscript{104} Coffeehouses were merely the beginning of a concept of universality, and whether or not they actualized a realm of accurate public opinion,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102}Outram, \textit{The Enlightenment}.
\item \textsuperscript{103}Habermas, \textit{The structural transformation}.
\item \textsuperscript{104}Pincus, “Coffee Politicians.”
\end{itemize}
they were the first major step in establishing the ideal in the first place. However, even with these limitations in mind, there was social diversity found within the coffeehouses, and the meeting of various social classes in the establishment is not simply a modern illusion.\textsuperscript{105}

Coffeehouses were defended by political and religious moderates and were patronized by all kinds of citizens.\textsuperscript{106} While we should be critical of over idealizing the past, we must also always keep in mind the social standards and conventions of the time period so that we can recognize when new and innovative social notions start to gain momentum and when a true break in history occurs.

In conclusion, coffeehouses emerged in the 1650s and spread like wildfire, and soon specialty coffeehouses for different professions and trade had developed. However, by 1815, only 12 coffeehouses remained in London as compared to the hundreds of the eighteenth century. Coffeehouses had come and gone in 150 years. Large-scale transformations of social and economic conditions, which had initially given birth and fostered Enlightenment coffeehouses, in turn, caused the decline of the institutions and coffeehouse life in general. The demise of the coffeehouse, particularly in London, was in part due to capitalistic, real estate pressures and the development of new public social institutions as well as in part due to the rise of home, familial, and individualistic lifestyles. These socioeconomic transformations led to a transition from an Enlightenment society with a clearly demarcated public sphere to a modern mass society that has blurred the lines between the public and private realms and between the state and civil society. Coffeehouses helped to give birth to capitalism, but the development of a highly consumeristic and commercialized society eventually led to a culture and economy that smothered the establishments and led to their gradual decline.

\textsuperscript{105} Robinson, \textit{The Early History of Coffee Houses in England}.

\textsuperscript{106} Pincus, “Coffee Politicians.”
Modernity: The Legacy of the Enlightenment

“Strong society, strong economy; strong society, strong state.”107

-Putnam

This section will argue that we should foster the social and rational culture of the Enlightenment—found in coffeehouses of the era—in the present and that we should do so by transforming certain socioeconomic standards and behaviors. This argument will be carried out in four steps: 1) Declare that modernity is an incomplete project that is still working towards the promises of the Enlightenment culture, 2) Identify potential remnants and legacies of Enlightenment coffeehouse culture in modern society, 3) Address why it is imperative that we foster the culture found within Enlightenment coffeehouses in our modern society, and 4) Outline the essential values and changes necessary for fostering this culture in the present. The argument addresses society on a broad level but will often use the United States as an example as the nation was uniquely created on the very basis of Enlightenment ideals, unlike many other nations, and provides a good model for observation and analysis.

Enlightenment in the Present

As discussed previously, evolving social and economic conditions led to the decline of the coffeehouse, but even more notably, these transformations caused the decline of the public sphere and the Enlightenment culture it fostered. The Enlightenment shared a highly intertwined, positive feedback relationship with socio-economic factors. In terms of the rise of the Age of Reason, the evolving socio-economic features of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries helped

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to foster and spread Enlightenment ideals throughout society at an unprecedented rate, while, in turn, the intellectual movement helped to further transform the era’s social and economic institutions. These innovative changes include the rise of a consumeristic society, increased social mobility, and the writing of constitutions as well as the formation of public and circulating libraries. The Enlightenment movement was able to cause a complete cultural upheaval and set the path for the development of modernity because of the relationship it shared with these social and economic changes. However, it was changes to these social and economic institutions and standards that also led to the decline of Enlightenment culture through the fall of the public sphere. The rise of mass commercialization and standardization throughout society, in the formation of institutions such as mass media, consumer culture, and partisan politics, served to undermine the critical, rational debate of the public sphere, and therefore stifle the ability of civil society to assert its opinion. It is social and economic barriers such as these that would once again need to be massively transformed in order to foster a modern Enlightenment culture and, in turn, an effective and influential public sphere.

In order to understand how to foster Enlightenment culture and the public sphere in the present, we have to understand modern public society and the notions of modernity that helped to shape it. Theoretically, what distinguishes the modern public from pre-modern forms is the traits of the public subject. Pre-modern societal life was about social status and group membership, while the modern public praises universality, equality, and common humanity.\textsuperscript{108} The theory of modernity promised to fulfill the ideals of the Enlightenment, which included progress, reason, and order, and to bring about a new wave of cultural evolution. However, modern society has fallen short of Enlightenment ideals by losing sight of the culture inspired by the movement and

\textsuperscript{108} Habermas, \textit{The structural transformation}.  

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allowing the decline of the public sphere.\textsuperscript{109} The historian Pippin asserts that “modernity seemed to promise what it finally could not deliver—an individually and collectively self-determining life.”\textsuperscript{110} Modernity is often highly criticized for its negative consequences, including a loss of a sense of tradition and community to social differentiation, individualism, and alienation.\textsuperscript{111} Many critics go a step further and argue that beyond failing to reach Enlightenment goals, modernity sinks society into a new barbarism.\textsuperscript{112} This is a fairly drastic and hypercritical sentiment, but it highlights the dissatisfaction many modern philosophers have with modernity. Regardless of interpretation and extent, a wide range of modern critics assert that modernity has not completely lived up to its promises although there is great hope in the potential for it to do so. We should not view modernity as a failure of the Enlightenment movement but instead view modernity itself as an unfinished project that has experienced equal measures of success and failure in its attempts to create a more enlightened and progressive society.

To further understand the socio-economic barriers of modern society that bar the augmentation of an influential public sphere, we also have to understand the foundation of this sphere: civil society. There are two central definitions for civil society: the first as an association for governance and the second as a counterweight to the state.\textsuperscript{113} The first argument for civil society asserts that an active and large civil association network is necessary to promote effective democratization through its ability to mobilize citizens and encourage tolerance, cooperation, and civic engagement.\textsuperscript{114} In the second argument, civil society serves as an independent sphere

\textsuperscript{109} Adorno and Horkheimer, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}.
\textsuperscript{110} Pippin, \textit{Modernism as a Philosophical Problem}.
\textsuperscript{111} Seyla Benhabib and Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves, \textit{Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).
\textsuperscript{112} Adorno and Horkheimer, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}.
\textsuperscript{114} Foley and Edwards, “The Paradox of Civil Society.”
of action and counterweight to the state that is capable of mobilizing citizens outside normal political groups to reflect on and resist, if necessary, current regimes. Overall, civic engagement and society is a realm of private and voluntary association, which can be political or apolitical. Civil organizations are essential for a healthy democracy as they can encourage democratization from below while pressuring power on top for change.

However, according to historians such as Robert Putnam, civil engagement has been eroding in the United States since the 1960s. There has been an overall decline in person-to-person sociality and, therefore, social capital. This decline in social capital is in response to the once vibrant public sphere being overtaken by the “private psychological scene,” to the detriment of both individuals and society. The public man, which was well expressed in seventeenth and eighteenth European city life, has weakened and been replaced with the private man. Public life—life outside of close family and friends—has been degraded, and we have lost that which once meant so much to us, as public sociality contributed to the development of personal skills and emotional ties with strangers. This idea is well expressed by historian Richard Sennett, in his book the Fall of Public Man:

“How has the stranger been transformed into a threatening factor? How is it that today, keeping silent and remaining as the audience is the only way of joining the public life? In turn, how do these factors foster personality deficiencies? Solitude that is a result of modernism renders the individual a person captured by the private life.”

The stranger has been transformed into an unknown and feared entity, which has exacerbated social differences and conflicts as so many societal problems are caused by a lack of understanding of those different from ourselves. Even more notably, this reduction in sociality undermines the active civic engagement and sphere of public influence that a strong democracy

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115 Foley and Edwards, “The Paradox of Civil Society.”
116 Sennett, Fall of Public Man.
117 Sennett, Fall of Public Man.
needs to flourish. Putnam argues that there has been a decline in the traditional secondary associations that compose the civil association network and that this decline has depleted the national reserves of social capital, social trust, and generalized reciprocity. People are not participating in the civic interactions that occur during socialized events and groups.

There have been many criticisms of Putnam’s theories, the most prominent being that there might be new or emerging social ties and forms of civic engagement which are not immediately visible or may have assumed different forms than in the past, such as nonprofit organizations and social movements. However, these criticisms do not discredit the fact that there are noticeable and substantial declines in civic participation. In regards to civic engagement in politics, there has been a decrease in political participation in the United States, including decreased voter turnout and lowered participation in public meetings and political parties. For example, the highest percentage of voter turnout in a presidential election was in 1876, when approximately 82% of the voting age population cast their ballot, in comparison to the recent 2012 presidential election when approximately 55% of the voting age population participated. This decrease in political participation has led to a growing distrust of the government, as people feel they are not part of the decision making. Individuals rely on opinions that are fed directly to them, which are often highly biased and partisan. A prime example of this phenomenon are the Jimmy Kimmel videos of citizens expressing their loathing of Obamacare but expressing their support for the Affordable Care Act. It is essential that American society, and all other

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118 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
119 Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*.
120 Ibid.
121 Foley and Edwards, “The Paradox of Civil Society.”
122 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
124 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*. 
countries with similar infictions, discover how to reverse these trends of decay in social capital in order to stimulate the civic participation on which democratic civilization relies on. Society needs to foster horizontal civil association networks that have the ability to bridge social, economic, and political divisions and that nourish autonomous, depolarized cooperation in a modernized public sphere.\textsuperscript{125} Now with a better grasp on modernity and the state of civil society, we can better analyze the social and economic conditions of modern society through examining the remnants of Enlightenment coffeehouse culture in the present.

\textit{Identifying the Remnants of Enlightenment Coffeehouse Culture in Modern Society}

The social and rational culture of the Enlightenment, as found in coffeehouses of the era, can be seen in the present but lacks the vitality it did in the past due to evolved social and economic conditions. Modern culture contains remnants of Enlightenment coffeehouse culture, but many of the key features have become distorted or unrepresentative. In terms of coffeehouses themselves, modern coffeehouses are “non-places” that lack the innovative and social spirit of Enlightenment coffeehouses.\textsuperscript{126} Individuals no longer gather in groups at the establishments to discuss and debate current events, politics, or literary works. Instead they sit alone or in small clusters, working on assignments with headphones in, talking on the phone with work associates, or having quiet conversations with friends. Local coffeehouses tend to better represent the historic culture than commercial ventures like Starbucks, often hosting sponsored lectures and small performances. However, these quirky establishments are rare finds, and only contain remnants of the culture of sociability. The modern coffeehouse is a far cry from the boisterous coffeehouses of the Enlightenment.

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{126} Markman Ellis, \textit{Coffee House}.
Nevertheless, in place of coffeehouses, there are other modernized, social institutions that are good representations of Enlightenment coffeehouse culture. There are a variety of nonprofit research and civic institutions that help to educate and inform the public. One of the best examples of such an institution is Project Vote Smart. This independent, nonpartisan institution works toward providing the public with free and unbiased information on governmental policy and leaders at all levels. Organizations like these help to educate citizens so that they can make informed decisions when selecting political representatives, hence helping increase civic engagement. There are many more examples of social institutions that help to foster this civic participation and social discourse. However, the problem with these institutions is the lack of participation from the general public and, therefore, the lack of representation of general society. While institutions like Project Vote Smart are free and easy to participate in, many citizens do not take the time or effort to engage or seek information. There is not a lack of opportunities and resources but a lack of appropriate cultural and social behaviors, often driven by limited and individualized leisure time.

In terms of the legacy of Enlightenment coffeehouse culture on politics, the democracy of modern western civilization is rooted deeply within the values and ideas of the Enlightenment, especially those of civil liberties and representative government. There is no question that modern society contains many of the democratic notions that arose in the Enlightenment and that were so prevalent in coffeehouse culture. However, the “mass democracy” of modern society is not the ideal republic praised by Enlightenment philosophers and radicals. The democracy of today is not representative and is not based on the objective and constructive discourse preached in Enlightenment coffeehouses, particularly in the United States. A small fraction of the population shows up to the poll to vote, and significantly less actively participate in political life.
and discussion. The voice of the people is not heard, and, instead, a few policymakers craft a viewpoint for the masses to follow. With mass democracy, society lost the capacity to generate genuine debate and conversation. Many people would argue that our society has never been more democratic or representative of a general public, as many countries have obtained, or are close to obtaining, universal suffrage. However, the power of the public sphere is not about universal suffrage, but it is about a realm of persuasion and true representation, discussion, and debate. People often forget that elections have consequences. They choose representatives based off of polarized political lines and then are surprised and disappointed when their leader does not act and engage in politics in the way they wished them to. Democracy is not about voting and elections; it is about discussion and compromise. It is about society coming together to decide on the best path for all its citizens. While modern western governments are founded on the democratic notions established during the Enlightenment, they fail to live up to the standards of a truly representative public set by the public sphere ideal of coffeehouse discussions.

The influence of Enlightenment coffeehouse culture can be heavily seen in media and technology sources, which have incredible potential to generate and facilitate open and public discussions and form a new “spatialized” location of the public sphere. A lot of communication happens online nowadays, on social media sites and discussion pages. There are a plethora of media outlets, all containing the potential to foster free discourse and communication between people with diverse perspectives and backgrounds. In regards to social media, it has introduced an innovative avenue of discussion that seems to have almost unlimited potential to disseminate information and stimulate conversation. However, the impersonal interaction and specific utilizations of most social media products greatly falls short of public sphere ideals. Furthermore, the technological individualizing of socialization caused by internet and television has led to a
trend of social capital decay.\textsuperscript{127} Cellphones and social media have led to a decline in personal interaction, as shown by the usage of phones at the table instead of real conversation. Furthermore, the insightful and diverse discussions that could be occurring are instead blocked by short messages with often limited content or reasoned opinions. Albert Einstein remarked on these negative potentialities of technological progress: “I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots.”\textsuperscript{128} While new media outlets like social media have great potential to be useful discussion centers, we must not forget that the most essential component of these discussion channels are not the technological capabilities of the media but are rather our own social and rational human abilities. There have been recent increases of using social media avenues for social activism and the discussion of controversial but important topics, especially issues dealing with gender and race, but overall these sites are clogged with meaningless and often senselessly derogatory commentary.

In regards to more commercial media outlets, communication and advertising media often fail to live up to their potential, furthering isolating people and forcing them to conform to substandard social norms. Agencies of mass production and their culture impress standardized behavior on the individual as the only natural, decent, and rational one. Individuals define themselves now as successes or failures based on social norms and fail to truly self-evaluate and self-reflect.\textsuperscript{129} These mass media sources stifle public discourse and civic engagement by stifling individuality and unique viewpoints. Furthermore, the news and entertainment culture is often manipulative and stifles true expression and discussion. The outlets outright confess to the diminished truth of their information and use this excuse to evade any responsibility for the lies

\textsuperscript{127} Putnam, \textit{Bowling Alone}.
\textsuperscript{128} Alice Calaprice, ed., \textit{The Ultimate Quotable Einstein} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
\textsuperscript{129} Adorno and Horkheimer, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}. 
Many news networks rely on sound bites to tell the stories they want to sell and often discuss trivia to distract the audience, instead of focusing on the hard facts. Even worse, a handful of news stations, especially in the United States, can barely even be considered credible and factual sources any more but are instead platforms for demagogues to harangue the public with their biased and opinionated perspectives. Credibility and impartiality are the most important values of a successful news network, one that properly informs the public. The media of the present continues to fail to meet these simple standards. Of course, there are television shows and media outlets that help augment this civic and constructive discourse, including the HBO series Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, which works to educate its viewers through satirical yet informative comedy. People watch the show for the humor but leave relatively informed. However, these constructive commercial media outlets tend to be the exception in the United States, not the norm.

While the various institutions and outlets of modernity have the potential to foster an effective and blossoming civic discourse and participation, at the present, they fail to live up to their vast potentiality. Society in many countries fails to foster and advocate for a culture of sociality, discourse, and communication. It is this culture, which was so vibrant in Enlightenment coffeehouses, that must be fostered through transforming the social and economic conditions needed to bring it about.

The Need to Foster Enlightenment Coffeehouse Culture

We as a society have not yet accomplished the goals set forth at the beginning of the Age of Reason, but that does not mean we are not able to continue working towards them. We can and should foster Enlightenment coffeehouse culture in modern society to accomplish the goal of

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130 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 
becoming a civilized, progressive, and enlightened society. Primarily, we need to change social behaviors and re-involve people in public life for the sake of the individual and of society. As Richard Sennett argues, “Instead of hysteria, the civilization disease is now narcissism, the unableness to act regardless of one’s inner feelings.” Modern civilization is relatively stagnant in comparison to the massive changes that occurred during the Enlightenment, especially in more developed nations, and most of society is once again ruled by the status quo. How often do we hear disdainful remarks about certain current events and complaints for change but fail to see any attempts at actual action? Mankind needs to embrace individualism, creativity, public participation, and reflection in order to insight this change and to truly embrace humanity. Only then can we be considered a truly civilized and enlightened society.

Modern society has embraced the scientific spirit of the Enlightenment but has overall abandoned the rational and self-reflective spirit that underscored the progressive movement. With only the knowledge seeking and not the knowledge reflecting, we have sacrificed finding true applicability and meaning in our work. As Adorno and Horkheimer surmise:

“On their way to modern science human beings have discarded meaning. The concept is replaced by the formula, the cause by rules and probability…Under the leveling rule of abstraction…the liberated finally themselves have become the ‘herd’.”

Too often, do individuals forget or fear their inherent individuality and become “sheeple.” The herd mentality is comforting as it requires us as individuals to do and risk nothing. Being one of the flock has never been considered a daring decision. However, it is dangerous to social well-being and progress as seen in the popular counter-enlightenment Holocaust example. The refusal of individuals to speak out and break their social chains can lead to treacherous and inhumane acts going unopposed. In the words of da Vinci, “Nothing

131 Sennett, Fall of Public Man.
132 Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment.
strengthens authority so much as silence.”

Hitler would have never been allowed to continue in power if German public opinion had been more reflective and questioning. Most situations are not as drastic as this, but it is important to remember the drastic consequences a lack of social discourse and participation can have on social well-being.

Society must foster a culture that promotes individuality and creative discourse in order to overcome the socio-economic barriers preventing further enlightened progress. In Nietzschean logic, life should not embrace mindless comfort and the status quo but should instead aim for risky endeavors and inevitable progress. In the words of Nietzsche: “What is great in the human is that it is a bridge and not a goal: what can be loved in the human is that it is a going-over and a going-under.”

Mankind must not be afraid to dream, and society must be an open arena where individuals feel comfortable to dare to go under. We need to promote individual opinion and creativity in order to stimulate real discussion, have real human interaction, and to accomplish the positive and hopeful goals of the Enlightenment. Promoting the foundations of Enlightenment culture as found in coffeehouses—free, open, equal, and rational discussion—can restore the social discourse and participation that makes us human and that makes civil society necessary.

**Fostering Enlightenment Coffeehouse Culture**

This section explores some examples of cultural changes that would be necessary to overcome the socioeconomic transformations and obstacles that led to the decline of Enlightenment coffeehouse culture and that are limiting further work on the project of modernity. The brainstorming and selection of which social standards to transform and how to

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do so, whether mentioned in this paper or not, would need to be discussed and implemented by society as a whole itself. Without social acceptance and participation, new social behaviors and standards will not be able to take hold and have real power. However, influential individuals do have the ability to spark and spearhead these changes as shown by the plethora of social and economic activists that have attempted to influence and sway public opinion on a variety of topics, including women’s rights, economic disparities, and environmental issues.

To become a more enlightened society, one of the most important and necessary cultural changes is to foster social discourse and increase communication between all people or, in essence, to restore the influence of the public sphere. To nurture social discussion, conversations throughout society must be constructive, rational, and critical. The creation of a set of social standards for discussion is necessary to allow these conversations to flourish. The informal regulations for coffeehouse culture debate outlined by Markman Ellis should be instituted into modern social institutions and discussion through a public decision to reshape social behaviors. These rules were defined as a “fluid group management process.”¹³⁵ One of the most important regulations he listed is transcribed below:

“Politeness is not observed for the sake of a social propriety that exists outside the coffee-house, but in order for the discussion to be free and open. No-one to be brow-beaten by others into silence. Voices should not be raised. Incendiary rhetoric should be avoided. Each person should be allowed to speak, each person should only speak for an appropriate time, limiting themselves to allow for inclusion of other voices.”¹³⁶

The importance of this regulation cannot be understated. If individuals do not feel comfortable or safe to express their viewpoints, then they will not contribute to discussion and civic participation will be constrained. The atmosphere for discussion must be polite, open, and inclusive, so that individuals of diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and personalities feel free to

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¹³⁵ Markman Ellis, *Coffee House*, 160.
¹³⁶ Markman Ellis, *Coffee House*, 160.
participate. Ellis further establishes a solid foundation for social conversation rules through detailing the informal regulations of coffeehouse debate, but his descriptions can be made even simpler to understand and to follow. The informal social rules, based off of Enlightenment coffeehouse culture, should be as follows:

1. Be polite.
2. Be reasonable.
3. Be tolerant.
4. Be concise.
5. Be open.

The above rules may seem simple, but how often are they ignored and left on the wayside? There are countless examples throughout different avenues of society where these rules have been ignored. Modern media, especially within the United States, often fails to follow the rules, illustrated by the pointless haranguing of Fox News anchors and the distraction of CNN soundbites and media visuals. These programs have increasingly biased viewpoints that they just yell back and forth, attempting to beat their opponents into silence and shock the public with “incendiary rhetoric.” So often do these new sites detour from relaying actual information that it is difficult to call them news sources at all. They are a travesty in comparison to the rational and unbiased news outlets of the past, when trusted anchors such as Walter Cronkite ruled the air.

Another classic example in modern American life is the divisive, partisan nature of government. Elected leaders focus so much on their biased viewpoints, individual interests, and pre-established notions that they fail to listen and truly communicate with their fellow elected officials. The United States, like most successful nation-states, was built on compromise and that only comes from constructive social discourse and being open to change. The leaders that are elected or put in charge must be those open to new ideas and persuaded by the most rational and
wise argument so that they can make real and lasting change. If they continue to be obstacles to innovation and adaptability, our society shall never reach the status of an “enlightened one.” To quote Rousseau:

“But so long as power is alone on the one side, intellect and wisdom alone on the other, learned men will rarely think of great things, Princes will more rarely do noble ones, and the people will continue to be vile, corrupt, and unhappy.”

Following an informal set of conversational standards can help stagnant societies to embrace change and work toward a more enlightened society, which will in turn create a happier one.

Another important cultural change to promote a more civically engaged society is to augment access to education. Universal education was one of the central Enlightenment ideals. People, for the first time, started to believe the notion that all humans are inherently equal and because of this, have an innate possibility of becoming educated and participating in civil society. Education was seen as the universal equalizer, which it should be seen as today. We especially need to promote education that believes in the virtue of individuality, creativity, and self-reflection. Lecture series, such as TED talks or those hosted by universities, are a prime example of open and informative events that can help to educate and inform society at large so that individuals may be active, participating citizens. Great examples of creative learning include science fair projects and group competitions, which foster innovative thinking starting at a young age. As individuals feel more comfortable with creating and learning, they seek out new ways to further educate themselves and participate in activities that suit their interests. The fostering of creative learning early on creates a mind that is ready to prove itself and work towards something great. Society should increase the resources and prioritization given to primary education.

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137 Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, 64.
institutions across the board, in order to provide all children, regardless of social or economic background, with a proper education founded on the notions of creative and interactive learning. More emphasis should also be given to education founded on self-reflection and personal improvement as it is essential that citizens evaluate their own potential and decisions so that they may effectively learn from them and improve themselves. We can only understand and learn from both failures and successes if we take the time to evaluate them impartially and objectively. Without reflection, individuals continue on without any regards to the logic or humanity of their decisions, and all significance is lost in future decision making.

Another important cultural change to foster and revitalize Enlightenment coffeehouse culture is to promote active social lives. This sociality would involve interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives in order to develop critical and enlightened discussion that can bring about greater progress. City life has served as a center of sociality and exploring human interests and possibility for most of human history. We need to focus on promoting an urban and metropolitan lifestyle to make people comfortable with a diversity of experience. Furthermore, we can increase the sociality found within city life throughout society, with gatherings and events such as educational lectures, artistic performances, conferences, and cultural festivals. The city of Austin serves as a great example of a city that has embraced civic engagement and social participation. The liberal hub in a predominately conservative state, it is expanding at a rapid rate as flocks of people move there for the opportunities to live an active social life and meet and interact with new people in various activities. While not all people can live an urban city life, as there will always be more rural

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Ibid.
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vocations, we should try to foster urbanization as much as we can, for environmental, social, and political capital gain.

However, more important than the promotion of a metropolitan lifestyle to augment active sociality is to increase individual leisure time and advocate for widespread public service and participation. Many individuals are overworked, spending most of their time on the job, and have little extra time or energy to commit to social and political organizations. Juliet Schor, a Professor of Sociology, points to a 20 year decline in leisure time, as Americans have increased working hours over that time by the equivalent of one month per year. The rise of a capitalistic society was supposed to increase efficiency and free mankind from constant toil so that they could enjoy a higher standard of life. Instead, there has been an increase of working hours in the modern era that has left individuals, Americans in particular, so overworked that they are not partaking in activities that are the basis of civic and political engagement and instead are engaging in mostly passive leisure forms, like watching television or surfing the internet. It is much easier to go home after a long day and crash on the couch with Netflix then it is to attend a Nature Conservancy meeting, play on a local sports team, or volunteer at a soup kitchen. Overworked individuals are often exhausted and drained at the end of the day, and fall into stagnant and repetitive motions and thoughts, too tired to question social norms or wonder how to improve upon society. While social and economic changes need to take place in the work environment, people also need to be given adequate amounts of time away from work to have the option and opportunity to pursue other interests and become active, social participants within their communities.

These are only a few examples and thoughts on potential cultural and socioeconomic changes to make society less stagnant and to be able to move forward on the project of creating a more enlightened society. We as a society must choose how we wish to progress and the best methods of creating this change. I believe that we have both the willpower and desire to implement this transformation, a sentiment that is well expressed in President Barack Obama’s speech at the Selma memorial on March 7th, 2015:

“What greater expression of faith in the American experiment than this; what greater form of patriotism is there; than the belief that America is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals.”

Fostering Enlightenment coffeehouse culture in the modern era, while difficult and by no means a perfect solution, should hopefully stimulate a more social and rational society that is inherently self-interested in its own progress and betterment.

Conclusion

The culture of rational and constructive discourse and debate that occurred in Enlightenment coffeehouses should be fostered in modern society in order to increase civic participation and engagement. The project of modernity—the ongoing progress and improvement of society—is not yet complete. We need to once again stimulate the change in culture and in social standards and behaviors that brought about the positively and foundationally transformative Enlightenment era. We should increase the amount of time we have to participate in civil society, foster more social and interactive lifestyles, and augment the support and funding given to educational endeavors. As individuals, we can each work to become more involved with

the world around us and try to leave it a better place than we found it. However, it is only
through a united collective that we can truly have the power and capability to transform society
and shape it to our standards. To reach these goals, we must provide society with the solid
foundations of enlightened discourse and rational compromise. We can fulfill the promises of
modernity and become a truly enlightened civilization. We must only revitalize and foster the
Enlightenment culture that has already foundationally transformed society once before.
Author Biography

Sofie McComb is graduating as a Polymathic Scholar and a member of Phi Beta Kappa from The University of Texas at Austin with a B.S. in Environmental Science in May of 2015. Sofie was born in Toronto, Canada, but has moved around to live in Illinois, England, and finally Texas.

At UT, Sofie was actively involved in Natural Science Council, Senate of College Councils, Campus Environmental Center, RecSports, and Project VoteSmart. Participation in these organizations inspired an interest in policy work, particularly environmental policy. These interests led to the creation of an environmental thesis on land use change and a Polymathic thesis covering the subjects of history and policy.

Sofie will spend the next two years interning for policy organizations and performing conservation volunteer work abroad, before returning to school to gain a Masters in Environmental Policy. Ultimately, she hopes to work on international energy and climate policy in order to create a more sustainable and environmentally conscious society.