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World Masterpieces 272

## Notes and Thoughts on **The Enlightenment**

All notes owe credit to The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces, Eighth Edition, Volume 2

Selected notes from *Masterpieces of the Enlightenment*, pp. 1-7

Reason versus Passion

Rigid class order

Prescribed roles of behavior

Profound threat to established order.

Reformation ideas, scientific discoveries had challenged age-old foundations and assumptions about certainty.

Certainty now had limits and depended upon faith.

Obligation to society more deeply felt.

Struggle for certainty and guidance more isolated and individual. More "truths" from which to choose.

"Passions" of earlier times become products of the "unconscious"--scientific, behavioral.

Well-defined codes of behavior--models to follow.

Well-defined codes of behavior project outward assumptions about individual motive and behavior.

Well-defined codes of behavior provide masks for deceit, hypocrisy.

"If people lived up to what they profess, the world would be a better place."

But they often don't--we are what we do, not what we pretend or say.

A person's true self can be judged by his/her effect on others--Cleante in *Tartuffe*

Nature might provide standard of certainty since religion and society seem confused and untrustworthy. Beginnings of Romanticism.

Turn toward classics, classical standards (Greek/Roman), the past, for more trustworthy ("eternal") structures, elusive stability.

Classicist position: Modern art and literature are measured by the classics. Homer wrote the first and greatest epic poems. All modern artists can do is emulate, copy, modernize classical art forms and masters.

Human nature, human impulses, human issues, human tendencies are permanent and, therefore, translate to other times and situations. Thus, Racine saw his play *Phaedra* as having modern implications even though its setting is in classical mythology.

Modernist position: We stand on the shoulders of the classical artists and therefore can see farther, create new, discover, explore, exploit structures unknown to earlier artists and thinkers.

Issues:

Search for elusive social structure and security.

Passion versus reason

Catholicism versus Protestantism

Who holds authority and security and truth and permanency? Society? Nature? the church(es)? the king? the father? the individual?

*Tartuffe*

During the time the play is set, the father of the family had absolute power. His will was law.

The father decided whom his daughter would marry, often in spite of the daughter's wishes.

A woman's chastity (particularly that of a wife) was of utmost importance.

A son's economic status was totally dependent on his father's will.

The father of the family was much like the king of the time.