

The Enlightenment – selected excerpts

Pontus de Tyard, *First Solitaire or Prose on the Muses and Poetic Furor* (1552)

On good composing: “[The soul] is summoned back from the shadows of ignorance to the light of truth, from death to life, from a deep and stolid forgetfulness to a remembrance of divine and celestial things; so that finally it is moved, impelled, and incited to express in verses the things it foresees and contemplates.”

René Descartes, *Mediations* (1641)

Cogito, ergo sum.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “On What is Independent of Sense and Matter” (1702)

Tapping into our mental faculties (i.e., musicking) achieves oneness with the universe and makes us “resemble God in a small way, as much through our knowledge of order as through the order we ourselves can give to things within our grasp, in imitation of the order God gives the universe. It is also in this that our virtue and perfection consists.”

Leibniz, *La monadologie* (1714)

The best musical works are “a perpetual living mirror of the Universe.”

Alexander Pope, *Epitaph. Intended for Isaac Newton* (1730)

Nature, and Nature’s Laws lay hid in Night.
God said, *Let Newton be!* and All was Light.

Johann Abraham Birnbaum, *Defense of Bach* (1738)

The essential aims of true art are to imitate nature, and, where necessary, to aid it. If art imitates nature, the indisputably the natural element must everywhere shine through in works of art. Accordingly it is impossible that art should take away the natural element from those things in which it imitates nature—including music. If art aids nature, then its aim is to preserve it, and to improve its condition; certainly not to destroy it. Many things are delivered to us by nature in the most misshapen states, which however, acquire the most beautiful appearance when they have been formed by art. Thus art lends nature a beauty it lacks, and increases the beauty it possesses. Now, the greater the art is—that is, the more industriously and painstakingly it works at the improvement of nature—the more brilliantly shines the beauty thus brought into being.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences, Part 1* (1750)

The mind, as well as the body, has its needs: those of the body are the basis of society, those of the mind its ornaments.

So long as government and law provide for the security and well-being of men in their common life, the arts, literature, and the sciences, less despotic though perhaps more powerful, fling garlands of flowers over the chains which weigh them down. They stifle in men’s breasts that original sense of liberty, for which they seem to have been born; cause them to love their own slavery, and so make of them what is called a civilized people.

Necessity raised up thrones; the arts and sciences made them strong. Power of the earth, cherish all talents and protect those who cultivate them. Civilized peoples, cultivate such

pursuits: to them, happy slaves, you owe that delicacy and exquisiteness of taste, which is so much your boast, that sweetness of disposition and urbanity of manners which make intercourse so easy and agreeable among you – in a word, the appearance of all the virtues, without being in possession of one of them.

Ibid, Part 2

As the conveniences of life increase, as the arts are brought to perfection, and luxury spreads, true courage flags, the virtues disappear; and all this is the effect of the sciences and of those arts which are exercised in the privacy of men's dwellings...

Our gardens are adorned with statues and our galleries with pictures. What would you imagine these masterpieces of art, thus exhibited to public admiration, represent? The great men, who have defended their country, or the still greater men who have enriched it by their virtues? Far from it. They are the images of every perversion of heart and mind, carefully selected from ancient mythology, and presented to the early curiosity of our children, doubtless that they have before their eyes the representations of vicious actions, even before they are able to read.

Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute* (1752)

He who does not possess sufficient natural gifts for academic study probably has even fewer gifts for music. Yet if someone who gives himself to academic studies has sufficient talent for music, and devotes just as much industry to it as to the former, he not only has an advantage over other musicians, but can also be of greater service, to music in general than others... Whoever is aware of how much influence mathematics and the other sciences, such as philosophy, poetry, and oratory, have upon music, will have to own not only that music has a greater compass than many imagine, but also that the evident lack of knowledge about the above-mentioned sciences among the majority of professional musicians is a great obstacle to further advancement, and the reason why music has not yet been brought to a more perfect state

United States *Declaration of Independence* (1776)

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" (1784)

Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* "Have courage to use your own reason!" – that is the motto of enlightenment.

Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a portion of mankind, after nature has long since discharged them from external direction, nevertheless remains under lifelong tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. It is so easy not to be of age. If I have a book which understands for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a

physician who decides my diet, and so forth, I need not trouble myself. I need not think, if I can only pay – others will readily undertake the irksome work for me.

Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *A General History of Music* (1788-1801)

Like all products of nature, the arts and sciences grow to perfection only gradually... In music, as in all her works, nature has only scattered about individual things of beauty; it is the task of human beings to search them out, and to produce by means of their appropriate arrangement new creations—creations more perfect than those of nature herself...

The First Period of the Art.... In his primal condition man is a passive creature; his soul has not yet been put into action. Sense impressions are thus still the only impressions that he can receive; he is not yet capable of other impressions, in which his intellect first must make a comparison, and derive from the observation of a proportion or a symmetry a feeling of pleasure. These sense impressions must be all the more intense and stirring the less the intellect is cultivated, and capable itself of being engaged.

This explains why we find in all wild and uncivilized nations such great pleasure taken in the clamor of noisy instruments—in drums, for example, and rattles, in blaring trumpets, and extremely loud, ferocious shrieks... the more savage a people, the more it remains merely sensuous and poor in mental representations, the more powerful are its sensations and its organs of sense. Thus in this primal state a pure tone, taken for itself alone as an expression of the passions, must be crude and vigorous, and entirely in keeping with the power of these sense organs.

How long a people can tolerate this first crude state of music cannot be precisely determined. We do still find it today, however, among many Asiatic, African, and American peoples as pleasure and amusement in several ways. They combine it with dance, and use it not only for domestic and social diversion, but also in religious ceremonies and in their wars. But in all these different usages it is always the same deafening and concussive noise, which they love all the more the less their intellect is engaged or capable of engagement.

Marquis de Condorcet, *Sketch of a Historical Picture of the Human Mind* (1795)

Are those differences which have hitherto been seen in every civilized country in respect of the enlightenment, the resources, and the wealth enjoyed by the different classes into which it is divided, is that inequality between men which was aggravated or perhaps produced by the earliest progress of society, are these parts of civilization itself, or are they due to the present imperfections of the social art? Will they necessarily decrease and ultimately make way for a real equality, the final end of the social art, in which even the effects of the natural differences between men will be mitigated and the only kind of inequality to persist will be that which is in the interests of all and which favors the progress of civilization, of education, and of industry, without entailing either poverty, humiliation, or dependence? In other words, will men approach a condition in which everyone will have the knowledge necessary to conduct himself in the ordinary affairs of life, according to the light of his own reason, to preserve his mind free from prejudice, to understand his rights and to exercise them in accordance with his conscience and his creed; in which everyone will become able, through the development of his faculties, to find the means of providing for his needs; and in which at last misery and folly will be the exception, and no longer the habitual lot of a section of society?

Is the human race to better itself, either by discoveries in the sciences and arts, and so in the means to individual welfare and general prosperity; or by progress in the principles of

conduct or practical morality; or by a true perfection of the intellectual, moral, or physical faculties of man, an improvement which may result from a perfection either of the instruments used to heighten the intensity of these faculties and to direct their use or of the natural constitution of man?

In answering these three questions we shall find in the experience of the past, in the observation of the progress of the human mind and of the development of its faculties, the strongest reasons for believing that nature has set no limits on the realization of our hopes.

Christian Gottfried Körner, *On the Representation of Character in Music* (1795)

As a human product, it [i.e., art] should be differentiated from the effects of blind chance by evidence that it has been properly constructed. This is the basis of the law of unity. The superior composer tries to give his works this quality.