

## BLHS-108 Enlightenment, Revolution and Democracy

Fall 2017

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Mondays 6:30-10:05pm

Room: C215

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Office hours 5:30-6:30 Mondays and by appointment

### Course Description:

Historians use the term the Enlightenment to describe a period of European history during the long eighteenth century (roughly 1680-1800) when people began to understand the world in a fundamentally new way. Before this period almost everyone accepted as natural social hierarchy, monarchy, and the Catholic church's monopoly on education as well as religious doctrine and practice. Educated people's understanding of the physical world, human nature, and the proper ordering of our life on Earth largely came from classical sources, which scholars assumed to be definitive and unquestionable.

This certainty was destroyed rather suddenly by two enormous disruptions that occurred in the sixteenth century: the Reformation and the discovery of the New World. The first caused more than 100 years of religious disputation and warfare that undermined the Church's claim to have all the answers; the second introduced Europeans to formerly unimagined worlds and peoples and caused them to question their most basic assumptions about what was natural, right and even possible. By the late seventeenth century ancient wisdom began to seem inadequate—in many cases it had been shown to be demonstrably false (i.e. the world was not flat after all)—so thinking people undertook a new intellectual project to make sense of their reality without the aid of religion and tradition, by using their own reason as their guide. They picked up tools pioneered during the Scientific Revolution—empirical observation and the scientific method—and set about creating a new science of man.

Centered in Paris but connected by improving communications, an international community of *philosophes* posited new social and political arrangements inspired by their belief in human progress and man's ability to build a more just, free and reasonable way of life for himself. Their ideas spread to increasing numbers of literate Europeans at home and in their overseas colonies. By the 1760s and 1770s many literate Europeans on both sides of the Atlantic were deeply inspired by this Enlightenment project to imagine an enlightened republic that would provide liberty, equality and fraternity to all its citizens. This was the spirit that shaped the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789.

Our class will focus mainly on the political implications and consequences of the Enlightenment project and demonstrate how many of our modern Western beliefs and values are the product of this European movement. Our faith in representative democracy and commitment to equality, human rights and free market liberalism are all products of the Enlightenment. We will study these ideas in their historical context so as to better understand where they come from, how they evolved in different places and finally,

what limitations, contradictions and potential dangers were wrapped up in this grand project to improve humanity.

## **Learning Objectives**

Students will demonstrate an understanding of major Enlightenment-era thinkers and key ideas such as progress, democracy, universal human rights, etc.

Students will be able to explain how Enlightenment ideas contributed to the course of the American and French revolutions.

Students will be able to explain the major shortcomings and contradictions of the Enlightenment project.

Students will demonstrate historical research skills and the ability synthesize and present information in written and oral format.

Students will deepen their ability to read complex historical texts carefully and critically.

## **Required Texts\***

*Please order/borrow these specific editions so that you can find passages easily during class discussions.*

Isaac Kramnick, ed. *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*

*ISBN-13:* 978-0140245660

*ISBN-10:* 0140245669

Aphra Behn. *Oroonoko, The Rover and Other Works*

**ISBN-10:** 0140433384

**ISBN-13:** 978-0140433388

John Locke. *Two Treatises on Government*

*ISBN-13:* 978-0300100181

*ISBN-10:* 9780300100181

Baron Montesquieu. *The Persian Letters*

*ISBN-13:* 978-0140442816

*ISBN-10:* 0140442812

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. ed. Frederick Watkins *Political Writings*

*ISBN-13:* 978-0299110949

*ISBN-10:* 029911094X

Voltaire's *Letters on England*. (*Penguin Classics edition*)

**ASIN:** B00ERJF39S

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*

*ISBN-13:* 978-0486290362

*ISBN-10:* 0486290360

\*Other texts listed on the syllabus can be found on the course's CANVAS page.

## **Course Requirements and Grading**

### Weekly quizzes (20%)

Every class will begin with a 15-minute quiz on that day's readings. You will be given a short list of questions the week before and I will choose one of those questions at the beginning of class for you to answer. Each quiz will be worth 10 points. There will be 11 quizzes over the course of the semester, so I will drop your lowest grade.

### Research Project and Presentation (20%) [Stars of the Enlightenment Project]

At the beginning of the semester you will choose/be assigned a leading figure of the Enlightenment to research for an oral presentation. When your week arrives you will give a presentation to the class that describes the person's life, works, influence on the Enlightenment and historical significance. The presentation should last at least 20 minutes, but no more than 25 minutes and be followed by 5-10 minutes of questions/discussion. You will need to submit a bibliography for this project, but no other written materials.

### Two essays (20% each)

Midway through the semester and at the end you will write a five-page essay discussing some of the major themes we have covered in class. You will receive more specific instructions when the time comes.

### Class participation (20%)

Your success in this class and the success of the class as a whole depends on your informed, thoughtful participation. You are expected to arrive to every class (on time) having read the material carefully, preferably more than once, and having taken copious notes. You should always review your notes shortly before class and highlight specific passages that you did not understand and/or would like to discuss. Your careful preparation will benefit your quiz grade and ensure to a lively intellectual exchange during class, which, after all, is the whole point.

### Course Grading scale:

90-100% = A

80-90% = B

70-80% = C

60-70% = D

Below 60% = Failure

## Schedule of Classes

Class 1 August 30, 2017 ✪ What is Enlightenment?

Passages in Kramnick:

Introduction

*What is Enlightenment?* (1784) by Kant

*Encyclopédie* by Diderot,

*The Future Progress of the Human Mind* by Condorcet.

*Star of the week: Aphra Behn*

Class 2 September 11, 2017 ✪ Questioning Ancient Wisdom in Light of New Discoveries

Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) (READ Introduction too)

*Star of the week: Baron de Montesquieu*

Class 3 September 18, 2017 ✪ Rejecting Church Teachings and Authority

In Kramnick:

*A Letter Concerning Toleration* by Locke

Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) (excerpts)

Voltaire's *Letters on England* (1733) (excerpts)

*Star of the week: Voltaire & Émilie du Châtelet*

Class 4 September 25 ✪ Reconsidering Natural Laws: a New Science of Man & Progress

Kramnick:

*On Bacon and Newton* by Voltaire,

Hume's *A Treatise on Human Nature*,

Francis Hutcheson's *An Inquiry Concerning our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good*,

Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments and The Four Stage Theory of Development*,

*The Progressive Character of Human Nature* by Ferguson,

*The Perfectibility of Man* by Condorcet

*Stars of the week: David Hume & Francis Hutcheson*

Class 5 October 2, 2017 ✪ Positing A New Social Contract

Kramnick:

*The Spirit of Laws* by Montesquieu,

*The Social Contract* by Rousseau

John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*

☐ *Stars of the week: John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau*

\*\*October 9, 2017 DISTANCE LEARNING ASSIGNMENT; NO CLASS

Watch political philosophy round up lecture on line. Write ESSAY.

ESSAY #1 DUE October 14, 2017 at 5:00pm.

Class 6 October 16, 2017 • Political Influence of Enlightenment Thought in America

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and *Rights of Man*

☐ *Star of the week: Thomas Paine & Benjamin Franklin*

Class 7 October 23, 2017 • Revolutionary Ideas in America

*The Declaration of Independence*

*Federalist No. 10*

*The Constitution of the United States of America*

☐ *Stars of the week: James Madison & Thomas Jefferson*

Class 8 October 30, 2017 • The Enlightenment in Poland

Rousseau's *Considerations on the Government of Poland*

The Constitution of the 3rd of May, 1791

☐ *Star of the week: Tadeusz Kościuszko*

Class 9 November 6, 2017 • The French Revolution: Enlightenment Thought in Practice

*The Declaration of the Rights of Man*

*A Short History of the French Revolution*

☐ *Star of the week: Georges Danton & Germaine de Staël*

Class 10 November 13, 2017 • The Birth of Liberal Economics.

Kramnick: *The Fable of the Bees* by Mandeville,

Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (selections)

☐ *Star of the week: Adam Smith*

Class 11 November 20, 2017 • Social Progress? Slavery and The Abolition Movement

*The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano*

☐ *Star of the week: William Wilberforce*

Class 12 November 27, 2017 ● Social Progress? The Women's Question

Mary Wollstencraft *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

☐ *Star of the week: Mary Wollstencraft*

Class 13 December 4, 2017 ● An Assessment of the Enlightenment Project

Kramnick: *A Critique of Progress* by Rousseau

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

☐ *Star of the week: Sir Edmund Burke*

ESSAY #2 DUE December 9, 2017 at 5:00pm

## **Class Policies**

Please turn off all electronic devices (including laptops) and place them out of sight during class.

You are a critical part of our class and therefore, are expected to attend all classes, be on time, prepared and engaged, for the entire time scheduled. Bring coffee as necessary.

Deadlines must be absolute to have their desired effect, but given that bad luck and accidents sometimes happen, everyone is automatically allowed a 24-hour extension for each of their essays, no questions asked. However, after that grace period, no late work will be accepted.

Please take a moment to read and consider the Georgetown Honor Pledge:

*In the pursuit of high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor system: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

Please consult [www.georgetown.edu/honor](http://www.georgetown.edu/honor) if you have any questions about this. If you have questions about how to cite others' work, see me. Any case of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council and if proven will result in failure of the assignment and possibly the course.

If you have a disability you should contact the Academic Resource Center ([arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu)) and fill out the appropriate paper work ASAP. If you require any accommodation to succeed in this class, please speak to me and we will work with the appropriate people to arrange a solution. Further questions can be answered at [www.georgetown.edu/studentaffairs/arc/disability](http://www.georgetown.edu/studentaffairs/arc/disability)