

Tufts University
Spring 2011
Wed., 6:30-9:00
Packard Seminar Room

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Office hours: Mon./Wed., 4:30-5:30
Packard Hall 109

PS 156 – Seminar: Enlightenment Political Thought

This course will examine the political theory of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, focusing on the thought of David Hume, Adam Smith, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot. The Enlightenment did much to inspire our way of life in the modern West – for instance, our liberal democratic politics, market capitalist economies, embrace of technological progress and scientific inquiry, and toleration of religious pluralism. Thus, studying the Enlightenment allows us to examine the original arguments for our way of life, as well as the limitations that these thinkers themselves placed on their arguments. However, we will also consider some contemporary criticisms of the Enlightenment. Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that we have inherited so many of our ideals, practices, and institutions from this period, Enlightenment thought has been roundly criticized by scholars on both the left and the right in recent years. For instance, the Enlightenment is often associated with a “hegemonic” moral and political universalism, a blind “faith” in abstract reason, and a reductive and isolating focus on the individual. In addition to considering the arguments of these five thinkers themselves, then, we will also consider whether (or to what extent) the critics are correct in their assessment of the Enlightenment.

Course Format and Requirements:

By far the most important requirement of the course is that you complete all assigned readings *carefully* and *before class*. My recommendation is to go over the readings relatively quickly once, to see what topics are covered and to pick out the main ideas, and then do them again, slowly and carefully, taking notes about what seems important or intriguing and about what you don't fully understand. These notes will also help immensely in generating useful and stimulating class discussion.

The class will be conducted in seminar format, and you should plan on participating every day. High-level participation requires that you grapple with the central ideas and arguments of the readings ahead of time, and bring to class any questions or confusions you might have. Note that class participation is not simply a “fudge factor” in determining your grade; a key component of the course is learning to articulate your thoughts/questions and to engage in our conversation about the issues at hand. You can expect to be called on if you do not volunteer. For those who feel nervous about talking in class, I encourage you to come see me early in the semester so that we can develop strategies for effective participation.

Attendance is required; more than one absence without a proper excuse will affect your participation grade, and absence from four or more classes will automatically result in a failing grade. Students arriving late will generally be counted as absent.

In addition to careful reading, regular attendance, and thoughtful class participation, the requirements of the course include one response paper (5-7 pages), weekly Blackboard posts on the response papers of others, a presentation on the last day of class, and a final paper (10-15 pages).

Beginning the third week of the semester (Feb. 9), at least one student will write a 5-7 page paper on each week's readings. You are required to write one such paper during the course of the semester; I will hand out a sign-up sheet in class on Feb. 2. The paper will be due the Monday before class (by midnight), and it should be posted on the Discussion Board on Blackboard in order to make it available to the other members of the seminar. I will hand out a set of guidelines for writing these papers.

Every week, the other students are required to post a response to the paper on Blackboard. (You are allowed to miss one of these posts without a penalty; more than one will count against your participation grade.) These posts don't need to be extensive – a paragraph or two will suffice – but they should offer a clear, concise, and thoughtful response to the argument presented in the paper. Is the author's argument well supported? Is it convincing? Does the author consider the most serious potential counter-arguments? These responses should be posted by noon on the day of our class meeting. Obviously, in order to formulate a thoughtful response you will have to have read both the student paper and that week's readings. While these are online posts, you should write them with the same care and in the same style as you would a normal paper – in other words, full citations, no abbreviations or acronyms, and so on.

The last day of class (April 27) will consist of a series of presentations organized as a kind of debate. Over the course of the semester, we will focus on three key contemporary criticisms of the Enlightenment: 1) that Enlightenment thinkers adopted a universalist outlook in morality and politics, 2) that they embraced a kind of political rationalism, and 3) that they encouraged atomistic individualism. As we near the end of the semester, students will be divided into groups of 2 or 3 and assigned to one of these three criticisms, on either the "pro" or "anti" Enlightenment side. (So, for instance, your group might be expected to defend the Enlightenment against the charge of political rationalism, or to argue that these thinkers did in fact encourage atomistic individualism.) On the last day of class, each group will give a short presentation of about 8-10 minutes in support of their case, and then we will briefly discuss these issues as a class. (For example, one group will argue that Enlightenment thinkers did adopt a universalist outlook, then another will argue that they didn't, and then we'll discuss as a class which side ultimately seems more convincing.) Group members will obviously need to work together on these presentations, and each member should give part of the presentation to the class.

The final (10-15 page) paper will be analytical in nature and won't require any research beyond the course readings. The guidelines for the response papers also apply here, except that in the final paper you can focus on any or all of the authors we're reading this semester. The paper should tackle a genuinely provocative question – i.e., it should center on an important issue, and there should be no "easy" answer to it, or at least thoughtful arguments on both sides. You must begin by writing a proposal in which you clearly lay out the question/problem that your paper will explore and present some preliminary suggestions as to how your argument will proceed. These proposals should be around 1-2 pages and are due in class on April 13. You will then meet with me to discuss your proposal on or around Friday, April 15, and Tuesday, April 19. A hard copy of the final draft of the paper is due in my box in Packard Hall by 5 pm on Friday, May 6. (I will not accept these papers via email.) Late papers will be penalized by 5 percentage points for each day they are late.

Papers will be given a numerical grade on the following scale:

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-76	D-	60-62
B	83-86	C-	70-72	F	59 and below

Grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation (including weekly Blackboard posts)	20 %
Response paper	25 %
In-class presentation	15 %
Final paper	40 %

The university's policy on academic honesty will be strictly adhered to. For more information on plagiarism and the proper citing of sources, see:

<http://uss.tufts.edu/arc/writingresources/plagiarism.asp>

Required Texts:

David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987).

Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. A. L. Macfie and D. D. Raphael (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982).

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981). Two volumes.

Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Voltaire, *Letters concerning the English Nation*, trans. Nicholas Cronk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Voltaire, *Candide and Related Texts*, trans. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000).

Denis Diderot, *Political Writings*, trans. John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

These books are available at the bookstore; please buy the editions and translations listed here. All other readings will be made available on Blackboard.

Course Schedule and Readings:

- 1/26 Introduction
- 2/2 Robert Darnton, "The Case for the Enlightenment" (pp. 332-45)
Michael Oakeshott, selections from "The New Bentham" and "Rationalism in Politics"
(pp. 138-40, 5-11)
Isaiah Berlin, selections from "The Counter-Enlightenment" and "The Pursuit of the
Ideal" (pp. 243-46, 2-13)
John Gray, "Enlightenment's Wake" (pp. 144-84)
- 2/9 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, sections 1-3, 5, 9,
appendices 1 and 3, and "A Dialogue" (pp. 73-98, 104-118, 145-63, 170-75, 185-
99)
David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" (in *Essays*, pp. 226-49)
- 2/16 David Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts," "Of the Original Contract," "Of Passive
Obedience," "Of the Origin of Government," and "Idea of a Perfect
Commonwealth" (in *Essays*, pp. 268-80, 465-92, 37-41, 512-29)
- 2/23 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*
Smith's moral theory: pp. 9-19, 67-71, 78-85, 109-19, 134-37, 156-61
The question of cultural relativism: pp. 200-211
Commerce and morality: pp. 61-66, 212-17
Commerce and happiness: pp. 50-53, 149-51, 179-87
The "spirit of system": pp. 231-34
(This is the roughly the order in which we will discuss these topics in class; feel free to
read the pages in sequential order if you prefer. Also, make sure you're reading the text
and not the editor's introduction.)
- 3/2 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*
The causes of the wealth of nations: pp. 10-30
The invisible hand: pp. 341-46, 452-56
The role of the state: pp. 687-88, 723-31, 781-97, 814-16
History and progress: pp. 689-701, 706-23, 381-90, 397-405, 411-22
(See the note above.)
- 3/9 Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, foreword, preface, Books 1-3, 4 (chapters 1-5), 5
(chapters 1-14), 6 (chapters 2, 9, 12, 17), 8 (chapters 1-10, 16-17, 19-21) (pp. xli-
xlv, 3-36, 42-63, 74-75, 82-83, 84-86, 92-93, 112-19, 124-25, 126-28)
- 3/16 Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Books 11 (chapters 1-7, 20), 12 (chapters 1-2),
14 (chapters 1-5, 13), 15 (chapters 1-9), 18 (chapters 1-5), 19 (chapter 27), 20
(chapters 1-5, 7), 24 (chapters 1-8, 19), 25 (chapters 9-13) (pp. 154-67, 186-88,
231-36, 242-43, 246-53, 285-88, 325-33, 337-41, 342-43, 459-65, 472-73, 487-92)

Spring Break

- 3/30 Voltaire, *Treatise on Metaphysics*, chapters 8-9 (pp. 90-97)
 Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, preface and letters 1-14 (pp. 5-66)
 Voltaire, selection from "Government" in *Questions on the Encyclopedia* (pp. 56-61)
 Voltaire, "Micromegas" (pp. 89-106)
- 4/6 Voltaire, *Candide* (pp. 1-79)
- 4/13 Denis Diderot, *Encyclopedia* entries on "Natural Right" and "Encyclopedia" (pp. 17-27)
 Denis Diderot, *Observations on the Nakaz*, sections 1-8, 18-19, 24, 26, 145 (pp. 81-90, 96-97, 100, 101, 164)
 Denis Diderot, contributions to *History of the Two Indies*, sections 1, 3, 9, 11, 16-17, 25, 27-28 (pp. 169-70, 171-73, 179-80, 182-83, 188-91, 207-9, 209-12)
- Proposals for final papers due in class**
- 4/15 and 4/19 **Individual meetings with me about papers**
 (Friday and Tuesday)
- 4/20 Denis Diderot, contributions to *History of the Two Indies*, sections 2, 6-7, 14, 18-24, 26, 29
 (pp. 170-71, 175-79, 185-88, 191-207, 209, 212-14)
 Denis Diderot, *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage* (pp. 35-75)
- 4/27 Class presentations/debate
- 5/6 **Final papers due by 5 pm (in my box in Packard Hall)**
 (Friday)