The Enlightenment (GOVT 276)
Hamilton College
Spring 2006

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Class Hours: MW 2:30-3:45, SCCT 1039
Office Hours: MW 4-5 and by appointment, KJ 217A

Course Overview

The Enlightenment was a constellation of eighteenth century North Atlantic intellectuals, artists, and political actors debating questions of truth, morality, religion, aesthetics, and justice. It helped demolish European monarchies and aristocracies, foment the American and French Revolutions, and lay the theoretical foundations for the modern university, capitalism, liberalism, and democracy. In this course, we read several key texts of the Enlightenment to understand it and to consider its contemporary legacy.

The course commences by surveying the intellectual and historical background of the Enlightenment, in particular, by examining Paul’s Letter to the Romans (ca. 57). Then, we read Machiavelli’s *Discourses on Livy* (1532), a book from the Renaissance that exhorted philosophers to propose “new modes and orders.” The next three books — Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651), Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), and Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (1762) — take up Machiavelli’s invitation and articulate political philosophies using the idea of a social contract. Hobbes emphasizes humanity’s vulnerability, Locke humanity’s acquisitiveness, and Rousseau humanity’s natural goodness, but each author agrees that humanity is responsible for fashioning its own politics. The subsequent books we read — Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Kant’s *Political Writings* (1780s), and Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) — contribute to our ideas of an enlightened society. Smith advocates the humanizing effect of capitalism, Kant envisions a just, peaceful, cosmopolitan order, and Wollstonecraft presses philosophes to extend their principles to women as well as men. Throughout the course, we will discuss how the Enlightenment influences contemporary intellectual and political life and how it may be extended today.

For each philosopher, we pose six questions:

1. What is their biography?
2. What philosophical problems do they address?
3. What political problems do they address?
4. A) What is their theory of human nature?
   B) What is their theory of politics?
5. How do they justify their theories?
6. What do we think of their theories?
Course Requirements


**Final Exam** on Rousseau, Smith, Kant, and Wollstonecraft. May 10.

**Class Participation**: Students are expected to come to class prepared with detailed notes and questions on the material and to participate in class.

**Class Presentation/Paper**: On the last day of each author (except Machiavelli), we discuss the author’s contribution to thinking about contemporary politics. Early in the semester, I assign students to groups. On the day your group presents, each student will present a 4-6 page paper discussing the author’s relevance to current debates about patriotism, school curricula, international relations, economic policy, women’s rights, affirmative action, etc.

Tips for Presentation/Paper:
- Write a rigorous paper, e.g., with title, introductory paragraph, footnotes
- Cite recent articles or books on the topic
- Cite key passages from the philosophical text
- Present from an outline and speak conversationally

**Final Grade Distribution**:
30% - Midterm Exam
40% - Final Exam
10% - Class Participation
10% - Class Presentation
10% - Presentation Paper

**Texts**

Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (University of Chicago Press)
Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge University Press)
Kant, *Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press)
Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Liberty Fund)

**Classes**

1. January 16 – Background to Enlightenment
“The Letter of Paul to the Romans”

2. January 18 – The Problems of *The Discourses*

*Discourses on Livy*, First Book, Dedicatory Letter-Chapter 10

3. January 23 – Machiavelli on the Religion of the Romans

*Discourses on Livy*, First Book, Chapters 11-15

4. January 25 – Machiavelli on Republicanism

*Discourses on Livy*, First Book, Chapters 16-35

5. January 30 – The Problems of *Leviathan*

*Leviathan*, The Introduction; First Part, Chapters 11-16

6. February 1 – Hobbes on Civil Government

*Leviathan*, Second Part, Chapters 17-21

7. February 6 – Hobbes on Religion

*Leviathan*, Second Part, Chapter 31; Third Part, Chapters 32-33

8. February 8 – Hobbes Presentations

9. February 13 – Locke on Civil Government

*Two Treatises of Government*, Second Treatise, Chapters I-IX

10. February 15 – Locke on Toleration

*A Letter Concerning Toleration*

11. February 20 – Locke Presentations

12. February 22 – Midterm

13. February 27 – The Problems of the *First Discourse*

*Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*

14. March 1 – Rousseau on Natural Man
The Social Contract, Prefatory Note, Book I

15. March 6 – Rousseau on the General Will

The Social Contract, Book II

16. March 8 – Rousseau Presentations

17. March 27 – The Problems of The Wealth of Nations

The Wealth of Nations, Book III

18. March 29 – Smith on Human Power

The Wealth of Nations, Introduction; Book I, Chapters I-V

19. April 3 – Smith on Political Economy

The Wealth of Nations, Book IV, Introduction-Chapter III

20. April 5 – Smith Presentations

21. April 10 – The Problems of Kant’s Political Writings

“An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” in Kant’s Political Writings

22. April 12 – Kant on Humanity

“Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History,” “Excerpt from The Contest of Faculties,” in Kant’s Political Writings

23. April 17 – Kant’s Politics

“Perpetual Peace,” in Kant’s Political Writings

24. April 19 – Kant Presentations

25. April 24 – The Problem of A Vindication of the Rights of Women

A Vindication of the Rights of Women, Prefatory Material-Chapter IV

26. April 26 – Wollstonecraft on Mankind

A Vindication of the Rights of Women, Chapters V, VIII, IX
27. May 1 – Wollstonecraft’s Feminism

*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Chapter XIII

28. May 3 – Wollstonecraft Presentations

29. May 10 – Final Exam

**First Appendix – Classics of the Enlightenment**

The European Enlightenment produced many important and profound texts – here are several you may consider reading on your own or in future courses.

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1513)
Montaigne, *Essays* (1580)
Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* (1605), *Novum Organum* (1620)
Galileo, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (1632)
Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637)
Pascal, *Pensées* (1670)
Spinoza, *Ethics* (1677)
Newton, *Principia Mathematica Philosophiae Naturalis* (1687), *Opticks* (1704)
Bayle, *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697)
Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710)
Leibniz, *Monadology* (1714)
Vico, *Scienza Nuova* (1725)
Voltaire, *Lettres Philosophiques* (1734), *Candide* (1759)
Pope, *Essay on Man* (1734)
La Mettrie, *L’Homme-Machine* (1747)
Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)
Diderot and d’Alembert, ed., *Encyclopédie* (1751-)
Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language* (1751)
Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence* (1776)
Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776)
Lessing, *Education of the Human Race* (1780)
Bentham, *Principles of Morality and Legislation* (1789)
Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)
Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1795)
Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795)
De Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1795)
Fichte, *The Vocation of Man* (1800)
Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807)
Second Appendix – Classics on the Enlightenment

Here are several classics on the Enlightenment written during the past century.

Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (1932)
Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947)
Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (1950)
Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1951)
Berlin, “The Philosophers of the Enlightenment” (1956)
Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism...* (1977)
Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity* (1985)
Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World* (1993)