

LSP 112 Section 605
Enlightenment and Its Critics
First Year Focal Point Seminar
Spring 2011
M-W 1:30-3:00, Lewis Bldg 1206

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and by appointment

“Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant”

Course Description and Objectives: This class is a first year focal point seminar on what we call the age of Enlightenment, the historical period that was marked by significant scientific, political, religious, and philosophical upheaval. Though it is difficult to establish with certainty when the historical Enlightenment “began” or “ended,” we can probably say that calculus, refined scientific observation, political economy, colonization, religious wars, the U.S. Constitution, and the French and Haitian Revolutions are all real expressions of the Enlightenment spirit. During this era, the notion of the individual begins to gain some consistency, and there is also a radical shift toward viewing morality, religion, art, economics, and political participation and power as centered around the agency of the individual. This liberal form of political subjectivity promotes human rationality as the key to shaping science, artistic expression, religious belief, politics, and human destiny as such. Thus, the enlightenment is not merely a historical period, but as a whole it exemplifies a focus on humanism, a belief that human rationality can lead to universal human progress and, eventually, the human transcendence of the world’s contingency.

The 18th Century’s Enlightenment legacy continues on in our present day lives, from the 1st Amendment to medical science, nuclear technology. It also lingers in less obvious places: racism, sexism, and all other forms of -isms, systemic environmental damage, eroded communal bonds, colonial legacies of poverty and exploitation. Thus the Enlightenment has its critics, those who think that the concept of Enlightenment does not deliver on its promises; or worse still, that the concept of Enlightenment cannot do otherwise than produce serious, undesirable effects. In this course, we will explore what Enlightenment is as well as such questions as: Has the Enlightenment political philosophy helped create docile, ignorant political agents? Has it established norms that presume to be universal but either are not or should not be universal? What is this “rationality” that Enlightenment speaks of? What is human progress? Are we still in the Enlightenment?

Reading and Assignment Schedule

Please obtain a copy of and start reading Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, so that you are preparing for our upcoming discussion on Week 5.

Week 1 What is Enlightenment? An Introduction

March 28 Monday: Course introduction on the idea of the Enlightenment: Selections from René Descartes, Francis Bacon, Benjamin Franklin, Denis Diderot, and La Mettrie, Discussion.

March 30 Wednesday: Sample Presentation by Instructor “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” Immanuel Kant

Week 2 Faith and the Enlightenment

April 4 Monday: Sample Presentation by Instructor "Letter to Christian Jacob Kraus (18 December 1784)," Johann Georg Hamann

Presentation #1 "The Age of Reason," Thomas Paine

April 6 Wednesday: Presentation #2 "The Argument for a Deity," Isaac Newton

Presentation #3 "No need of theology...only of reason" Baron d'Holbach

Week 3 Political Theories of the Enlightenment

April 11 Monday: Presentation #4 and #5 Selections from *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, John Locke

April 13 Wednesday: Presentation #6 and #7 Selections from *The Social Contract*, Jean Jacques Rousseau

First Exegetical Paper, Fellow Due Date April 13 (3-5 pages)

Week 4 Art in the Age of Enlightenment

April 18 Monday: Presentation #8 Selections from *The Magic Flute* (librettos), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Presentation #9 *Ode to Joy*, Friedrich Schiller and Ludwig van Beethoven

April 20 Wednesday*: Presentation #10 Famous Paintings and Sculptures of the Age of Enlightenment (A Philosopher Lecturing on the Orrery (Joseph Wright of Derby); Hercules and the Erymanthian Board (Giambologna); Vitruvian Man (Da Vinci); Newton (William Blake); The Anatomy Lecture of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp (Rembrandt); Elizabeth Countess of Dysart (Lely); Henrietta of Lorraine (Anthony van Dyck); and others.

Week 5 Enlightenment in the United States

April 25 Monday: Presentation #11 *The American Declaration of Independence* and "Letter to Thomas Jefferson" by Benjamin Banneker

April 27 Wednesday*: Presentation #12 "The Rights of Man" Thomas Paine

*First Exegetical Paper, Final Draft Due April 27 (4-6 pages)

Week 6 Frankenstein and Other Monsters of the Enlightenment

May 2 Monday: Viewing of film *Frankenstein* (1994)

May 4 Wednesday: Presentation #13 Discussion on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* and its 1994 movie adaptation

Week 7 Atomic bombs, Sexism, Racism, and Beyond

May 9 Monday: Presentation #14 "Reason Against Itself: Remarks on Enlightenment," Max Horkheimer

May 11 Wednesday*: Reconsideration of all the texts up to this point, general class discussion

*Second Exegetical Paper, Fellow Due Date May 11 (3-5 pages)

Week 8 Gender of the Enlightenment

May 16 Monday: Presentation #15 "Reason and Progress" in *Man of Reason: 'Male' & 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, Genevieve Lloyd

May 18 Wednesday: Presentation #16 Selections from *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft

Week 9 Race of the Enlightenment

May 23 Monday: Presentation #17 Selections from *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, Immanuel Kant.

Presentation #18 "Negro," *Encyclopedia Britannica* and "On Indians and Negroes" Thomas Jefferson

May 25 Wednesday: Presentation #19 "Who are you, then, to make slaves?" Denis Diderot

Second Exegetical Paper, Final Draft Due May 25 (4-6 pages)

Week 10 The Haitian Revolution and Beyond

May 30 Monday: Memorial Day - University is closed - NO CLASS

June 1 Wednesday: Presentation #20 on one of the following: Nicholson "The Enlightenment and Its Effects on the Haitian Revolution of 1789-1804", Mason "Haiti: Hope in Hell" (A Brief History of Haiti), and Klein "Haiti: A Creditor, not a Debtor."

Final Discussion and Final Paper Workshop.

Final paper due during Finals week (10-12 pages, developing a theme by using the first and second papers.)