

**BLHS-108 Enlightenment, Revolution and Democracy**

Faculty: Michael Kessler

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Georgetown University

Credits: 4

**General Course Description:**

This course examines the Enlightenment from the particular angle of its relationship to the cultivation of democratic ideals and the emergence of modern democracies. It thus examines issues such as toleration, the rights and responsibilities of the individual, the importance of reason, and the role of religion in society.

The particular focus of this course will be on a range of questions in social and political theory during the Modern period of the Enlightenment.

- What are the causes and nature of the lack of “enlightenment” that modern theorists argued must be overcome?
- What is human freedom? What are its origin and limits?
- What can humans know? How do we know? What are the possibilities and limits of human knowledge?
- What is the origin of political authority? Is it of divine origin? If so, what is the nature of the divine? If not, is political power the result of sheer force, collective agreement, reason, or tradition? Can there be rational arguments that ground political authority?
- Who properly holds political power? Does the sovereign ruler operate under any constraints (moral law, divine law, sheer necessity)?
- How do religious, moral, or strategic interests enter into the political and social spheres?
- What are the bases and justifications for political revolution, if any?

The course will be conducted mostly through discussion and in-depth analysis of the assigned readings, with some background lectures as appropriate. Students should be prepared to participate actively, based on a thoughtful reading of the texts.

**Course Goals**

- To explore and understand the intellectual, material, and historical character of the Enlightenment.
- To understand the arguments modern thinkers made for a new way to envision human freedom and reason.
- To understand modern arguments about the nature of political authority and legitimacy, the limits of state power, individual rights, and why democracy was the preferred system of government for enlightenment theorists.
- To understand these political issues within the broader context of religious, moral, philosophical, literary, artistic, cultural, and social scientific developments in the enlightenment period.

## Expectations and Assignments

- Class participation:
  - Students should be prepared to participate actively in each week's seminar discussions
  - Each week, one or two students will be assigned the task of co-leading the class discussion. We will discuss this more in class, but in general, your task will be to present an overview of key themes and issues from the reading and pose questions which the class should consider, as related to the topic of the course.
  - This portion of the grade will take into account familiarity with the readings, your active and keen questioning of the text and your colleagues, attendance, your time as a discussion leader, and the quality of your class participation in general.
  - LAPTOP COMPUTERS: You may use your laptops in class for note-taking, for looking up relevant items on the web related to class issues, and for referring to related class readings. All other uses of laptops during class time are unacceptable to a seminar with expected participation. Your participation grade will suffer greatly if you use your laptop for other than approved uses.
- You should strive to achieve the ideals of a liberal arts education: free and candid exchange of ideas, rigorous critique of claims, and toleration for considering variant positions. This portion of the grade will take into account familiarity with the readings, your active and keen questioning of the text and your colleagues, attendance, and the quality of your class participation in general.
- Students must adhere to the principles of conduct set forth in the Georgetown University Student Handbook.
- Attend the class. If you have a legitimate excuse, I need to know it (by email). Otherwise, please be there.
- Thoughtful reading of the texts in advance of class.
- We will have very active class conversations. I will ask students to take on and defend positions. You will be encouraged to ask questions, make critiques of other's claims, and you therefore need to be prepared for every class as if you may be asked about any of the material.
- Complete the written assignments, by the due date.
  - Four 5 page papers that focus on issues raised within a particular section of the class. I will pose multiple questions and students will select one to respond to.
  - More details discussed in class.
- Complete other shorter written reflections as assigned in class.

## Readings

The seminar will involve close textual readings and discussion. Students are expected to attend class with the readings. Some readings will be distributed via email in .pdf format

## DRAFT--SUBJECT TO REVISION

(and may be distributed as well in hard copy format). The following books are available for purchase:

1. Vitoria, *Political Writings*, Pagden ed. (Cambridge: 0-521-36714-X)
2. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Tuck, ed. (Cambridge: 0-521-56797-1)
3. Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen* Tully, ed. (Cambridge: 0-521-35980-5)
4. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Laslett, ed. (Cambridge: 0-521-35730-6)
5. Rousseau, *The Discourses*, (Cambridge: 0-521-42445-3)
6. Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, ed. Humphrey (Hackett: 0-915145-47-2)

### Schedule

- Week 1: Introduction: What is Enlightenment?
- Week 2: Vitoria: An Early Modern Account of Human Reason, Freedom, and Will: The Rise of the Individual
- Week 3: Enlightenment Instigators: David Hume, Rene Descartes, Voltaire, Diderot's *Encyclopedia* (handouts)
- Week 4-5: Hobbes: The Modern Individual, the State of Nature, and Political Power
- Week 6: Pufendorf: Natural Right, Peace, Security, and the State
- Week 7-8: Locke: The Natural and Rational Political State
- Week 9: Rousseau: Natural Human and Corrupted Citizen
- Weeks 10-11: The French and American Revolutions and the Founding of the Republics: Elisha Williams: The Brewing of American Discontent and the Path to Revolution; Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*; Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*; Marie-Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Women and Citizens*; William Godwin; selections from Madison, Jefferson, Franklin, and the Federalist Papers
- Week 12: Kant: The Pinnacle of Enlightenment
- Week 13: Vico and Burke: Critique of Enlightenment Revolution and Defense of Tradition and Authority
- Week 14: Conclusion