

HISTORY 415: SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY
PROF. ALAN CHARLES KORS **FALL, 2015**

History 415 is a survey of the thought of one of the most revolutionary periods in the history of human interaction, the century when Europeans debated and changed fundamentally the ways in which they thought about knowledge, about intellectual and all other authority, about the nature of religion and its place within their world, about human nature, about moral criteria, and about the possibilities of the human condition. We will study not historians, but solely primary sources—seventeenth-century texts themselves—seeking to understand the seventeenth-century meanings and receptions of seventeenth-century debates.

We will examine the main currents of seventeenth-century European thought: challenges to inherited authority; new theories of knowledge; a growing reliance on and confidence in natural explanation; debates about the relationship between natural knowledge and theology; skepticism; diverse ways of understanding nature and human nature. In short, the seventeenth-century in Europe produced an unprecedented challenge to the presumptive authority of the past, and it altered our world. This course will focus on works that were widely read in the seventeenth century and that were historically influential on the ages that followed. The course assumes no prior work in the subject (that's my job), and there are no prerequisites.

We shall read, in English, authors who transformed Europe's thought, debates, and civilization, either in their own right, or as part of broader movements of thought: Francis Bacon, René Descartes (twice, in two very different works), Galileo, Blaise Pascal, John Locke (twice, again, in two very different works), Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, Isaac Newton, and Pierre Bayle. You should witness, in these texts, the birth of the modern mind.

We are a course on history, doing intellectual history, not a course on philosophy. Our goal never will be to judge or argue the merits and demerits of our authors (you always enjoyably can choose to do that on your own, apart from our course), but to understand how Europe changed its foundational understanding of reality and how the world looked to different minds in a different time and place. The focus of our discussion will be analytic and comparative. It may be that two of you who agree about what an author believes or not might hold two different views of the author's rightness or wrongness. Our subject will be the former (analyzing an author and comparing him with other authors), not the latter (judging an author). Imagine, for the sake of argument, that we were studying Tibetan Buddhism or Medieval political theory. To summon those thinkers to judgment by our own contemporary or personal views of the world would be to study ourselves, not other minds or schools of thought. Our goal is to understand other minds and other ways of thinking.

The course will be organized around reading, lectures, and discussion. There will be an in-class mid-term exam (25% of your grade) and a regular, cumulative final exam (75%). Participation in discussion will raise your grade (but non-participation will not lower it). There are no required papers, because I want you to have the time to immerse yourselves in the readings, but if you have research interests or if you are uneasy about having only exams determine your grade, you may choose to write a paper, not for extra credit, but to count as half of your final-exam grade. I shall set up a class listserv, and each week, before a reading, I'll send out some "Questions for Reading" to help you organize your work and to give us a place from which to start discussion. Discussions, however, will be wide open to your own interests and questions. **YOU MUST PASS THE FINAL EXAM TO PASS THE COURSE.**

Class Schedule, week of:

08/27: Organizational meeting

Week of:

09/01: Introductory lectures: What You Learned at the Universities in 1600 (no readings, since you would have learned from Latin textbooks)

09/08: Bacon, *Selected Philosophical Works*, 66-148 (top)

09/15: Galileo, *The Essential Galileo*, 17-25, 97-102, 109-145, 179-201, 288-294, 300-306, 334-356

09/22: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1-59

09/29: Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, 1-87

10/06: Mid-Term Exam; 10/08: Fall Break

10/13: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 3-110 (top)

10/20: Pascal, *Pensées*, 3-75, 105 (“Christian Morality”)-112, 181-200, 225-233, 285-286 (top)

10/27: Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 1-115, 145-172, 222-230

11/03: Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1-78, 117-150, 166-187, 192-203, 208-254

11/10: Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 24-77.

11/17: Newton, *Newton’s Philosophy of Nature*, 1-67, 105-34, 173 (bottom)-179

11/24: No class Tuesday; Thursday, 11/26: Lecture: Religious Toleration in Europe

12/01: Bayle, *Historical & Critical Dictionary*, 45-63, 144-153, 166-209, 350-388, 395-444

12/08: Final Class: General Discussion

The final exam will be scheduled and posted by the Office of the Registrar

Fairness: You all will be treated equally. I give no incompletes except for attested personal or medical emergencies. You must take the exams on the dates scheduled (barring any conflicts under University rules), so plan your schedules now.

Books: Pennsylvania Book Center, 34th & Sansom Streets (not the U. of P. Bookstore)

Office hours: 307 College Hall, Tues, 1:30-2:30; Th, 2:30-4:30. Please come by and talk.

Email: akors@sas.upenn.edu (My students’ emails always get answered first.)