

## **HISTORY 416: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY**

**SPRING, 2014**

**PROF. ALAN CHARLES KORS**

History 416 is a survey of the thought of one of the most revolutionary periods in the history of human interaction. In the eighteenth century, Europeans debated and often changed fundamentally the way they thought about knowledge, about 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. Students will read solely primary sources—eighteenth-century texts themselves—seeking to understand the eighteenth-century meanings and the receptions of eighteenth-century debates. Our goal never will be to summon authors before the bar of our modern wisdom—they did not write for us—but to understand them historically, in context, on their own terms. We shall examine the main currents of eighteenth-century European thought: challenges to inherited authority; deism; natural religion; skepticism; evangelical revival; political reform; diverse ways of understanding nature and human nature; utilitarianism; materialism; and atheism. The course will focus on works widely read in the eighteenth century and historically influential on the ages that followed. The course assumes no prior study of the subject, 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: the baron Montesquieu, Voltaire (twice), Bishop Joseph Butler, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (twice), Thomas Paine, John Wesley, David Hume, Cesare Beccaria, Julian Offray de La Mettrie, and Denis Diderot.

We are a course on history, doing intellectual history, not a seminar on philosophy or political theory. That is to say, our goal will *not* be to judge or to argue the merits and demerits of our authors (you always can choose to do that on your own, apart from our course), but to understand how the world looked to different minds in a different time and place. The focus of our discussion will be analytic and comparative. We get to ask questions about authors' beliefs that they might never have asked themselves (for example, implicit views of human nature or of ethics). It may be that two of you who agree about what an author believes might or might not 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 task 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 midterm exam (25% of your grade) and a regular final exam (75%). Non-participation in discussion will not lower your grade, but participation in discussion will raise it. There are no required papers (I want you to have the time to immerse yourselves in the readings), but if you are uneasy about having only exams determine your grade, or if you have research interests, you may choose to write a paper that will count as half of your final-exam grade. I shall set up a class listserver, 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.

Assignments, week of:

1/16: Introductory lecture

1/20: Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 39-284 (It's a novel: note briefer assignments to follow.)

1/27: Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, 1-61

2/04: Rousseau, *Emile*, 266-315 (top of page)

2/11: Butler, *Five Sermons*, 11-67

2/18: Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 21-84, 89-195

2/25: Tuesday: discussion; Thursday, 2/27: in-class midterm examination

3/04: Wesley, *John Wesley*, 123-133, 198-209, 254-298, 377-383, 427-472

3/11: Spring Vacation (but come back)

3/18: Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 1-89

3/25: Voltaire, *The Portable Voltaire*, 556-569; then, 229-328.

4/01: Beccaria, *On Crimes & Punishments*, 1-81

4/08: Rousseau, *Emile*, 37-163

4/15: La Mettrie, *Man A Machine*, 27-76

4/22: Diderot, *D'Alembert's Dream*, 149-237

4/29: Last class: general discussion

Final exam: Date, time, and room will be posted on the Registrar's website.

**Books:** All books are available, in paperback, at the *Pennsylvania Book Center, 34th and Sansom Streets*. (If they run out of anything, let them—and me—know; they're very quick and attentive.)

**Office Hours:** Thursdays, 2:30-4:30 PM, or by appointment, 307 College Hall

**Email:** akors@sas.upenn.edu (Don't hesitate to communicate with me by email.)

**Fairness:** There will be no incompletes except for attested medical or personal emergencies, communicated to me and all your professors by your School (College, Wharton, and so on) advisor, and there will be no separate arrangements for the date of any examination, except as specified in University policy. You all should and will be treated equally.

**NOTE: YOU CANNOT PASS THE COURSE WITHOUT PASSING THE FINAL EXAM**

(In other words, if you're taking the course pass/fail and do well on the midterm exam, keep up with the class and keep reading.)