Field Seminar in Political Thought: The Enlightenment

Government 6075	Jason Frank	Isaac Kramnick
Cornell University	White Hall 307	311 White Hall
Wednesday 4:30-6:30	(607) 255-6759	(607) 255-9175
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	OH: W 10-12	OH: T 3:30-5:30 / Th 11-12

Course description and aims:

The topic for the field seminar in political thought this year will be the Enlightenment. We will read and discuss central texts of eighteenth century Enlightenment thought, including texts by Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Condorcet, Hume, Smith, Burke, Paine, and Kant. We will explore the political dilemmas to which these Enlightenment texts responded—such as political theology, feudalism, and absolutist monarchy—and critically evaluate their attempts to establish a more secular, rational, and democratic form of politics. Was there a single Enlightenment? How do we characterize it? How do we assess its political, moral, and philosophical legacies?

Course mechanics:

This is a political theory graduate seminar. Grades will be based on a research paper (20-25 page) due at the semester's end (65%), a short (7-8 page) written response to one week's reading (15%), a 10-15 minute oral discussion of another student's written response (10%), and general seminar participation (10%). Written responses will be circulated electronically NO LATER than 5:00 p.m. on the Monday before seminar meets. These papers should provide a close and critical account of the week's reading, focusing on one or two central arguments. Written responses are meant to provoke seminar discussion, so please avoid summary and feel free to be (thoughtfully) contentious. The papers must include direct citation of the reading discussed (with footnotes). Each seminar will begin with another student's 10-15 minute discussion *of the written response*. These oral presentations should also avoid summary and instead pose a series of textually supported critical questions that can facilitate a broader seminar discussion. A sign-up sheet for both presentations and discussions will be available the first day of class.

Books Available at University Bookstore:

Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful: And Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings* (Penguin)
Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Hackett)
David Hume, *Political Essays* (Cambridge UP)
Isaac Kramnick, ed. *The Portable Enlightenment* (Penguin)
John Locke, *Selected Political Writings* (Norton)
Montesquieu, *Selected Political Writings* (Hackett)
Thomas Paine, The Rights of Man (Penguin)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (Chicago)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses* (Cambridge)
Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Liberty Fund)
Voltaire, *Candide* (Penguin)

Weekly Readings

Material marked "*" is available on blackboard.
Material marked "PE" is in Isaac Kramnick, ed., *Portable Enlightenment*

Week 1 (January 21): What is Enlightenment?

Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" (1784) PE
Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?"*
Jűrgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Michel Foucault's Essay *What is Enlightenment*?"*

Week 2 (January 28): Experience and Enlightenment: Locke

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* – selections (1690)*
Of the Conduct of the Understanding – selections (1706)*

Week 3 (February 4): Reason, Religion, and Politics

John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689)
The Reasonableness of Christianity – selections (1695)

Week 4 (February 11): French Enlightenment I: The *Philosophes*

Voltaire, *Candide* (1759)
PE: 7-21, 23-25, 140-50, 168-74, 115-34, 202-9, 265, 287, 532-35.

Week 5 (February 18): French Enlightenment II: Montesquieu

Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* – selections (1748)
Persian Letters – selections (1721)

Week 6 (February 25): Rousseau and the Critique of Enlightenment

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750)
Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (1755)

Week 7 (March 4): Education and Nature

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (1762)

Week 8 (March 11): Scottish Enlightenment: Hume

David Hume, *Political Essays* (1742)
David Hume, "Of Miracles and the Origin of Religion" PE

Week 9: SPRING BREAK

Week 10 (March 25): Scottish Enlightenment: Smith

Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* – selections (1759)
Wealth of Nations – selections (1776) PE

Week 11 (April 1): The Radical Enlightenment and the Perfectibility of Man

Condorcet, *Sketch of the Historical Progress of the Human Mind* – selections (1795)*
PE: 26-39, 64-74, 150-55, 361-63, 369-395, 473-80, 552-60.

Week 12 (April 8): Aesthetics and Authority: Burke

Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757)

Week 13 (April 15): Burke and the French Revolution

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)

Week 14 (April 22): Paine and the French Revolution

Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (1791)
Age of Reason – selections (1794) PE

Week 15 (April 29): Counter-Enlightenment?

Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment"*
Max Horkheimer, "Reason Against Itself: Some Remarks on Enlightenment"*
Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?"*