THE AGE OF REASON

Subject Description. Has there ever been an “Age of Reason?” In the western tradition, one might make claims for various moments during Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. In this class, however, we will focus on the two centuries from the late 1600s to the mid 1800s, a period when insights first developed in the natural sciences and mathematics were seized upon by social theorists, institutional reformers and political revolutionaries who sought to change themselves and the society in which they lived. Through the study of trials, art, literature, music, politics, philosophy, and culture more generally, we will consider evolution, revolution, and their opponents in these two centuries.

Subject Requirements. Active class participation is central to our work together. Attendance is mandatory, and students are expected to arrive in class on time and prepared to discuss common readings. Students will write three seven-page papers during the term. Half the class members will rewrite the first essay, and half will have an opportunity to rewrite either the first or the second essay. In addition, to satisfy the CI-H speaking requirement, we will conduct two in-class debates on 3/11 and 4/22; each student will have a central speaking role in one of the debates. Instructions for the papers and debates will be distributed later in the term. There will be no midterm and no final. Each assignment will be weighted as follows in the calculation of the final grade, although these calculations will also take into account improved performance during the course of the semester:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three 7-page essays</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Debates</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>200</td>
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Required Reading. The following books are available for purchase at the MIT Bookstore; they will also be on reserve in the Hayden Library. All other class readings, indicated with an asterisk (*), are available online at the class website.

Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs and Margaret C. Jacob, *Newton and the Culture of Newtonianism*
Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*


Criteria for HASS CI Subjects. Communication intensive subjects in the humanities, arts, and
social sciences should require at least 20 pages of writing divided among 3-5 assignments. Of these 3-5 assignments, at least one should be revised and resubmitted. HASS CI subjects should further offer students substantial opportunity for oral expression, through presentations, student-led discussion, or class participation. In order to guarantee sufficient attention to student writing and substantial opportunity for oral expression, the maximum number of students per section in a HASS CI subject is 18, except in the case of a subject taught without sections (where the faculty member in charge is the only instructor). In that case, enrollments can rise to 25, if a writing fellow is attached to the subject.

Statement on Cheating and Plagiarism: The web now hosts many sites which offer college-level papers of varying quality on a variety of topics. I am well acquainted with these sites, and with others that offer detection services to professors. **Buying a paper and submitting it as your own work is cheating. Copying sections from someone else’s print or online work into your own without an acknowledgement is plagiarism.** MIT has strict policies against both activities that I will fully enforce. For the appropriate MIT definitions and policies, visit the following websites. If you are uncertain about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please contact me before submitting the work in question.

- MIT Online Writing Communication Center: [http://writing.mit.edu/wcc](http://writing.mit.edu/wcc)
- Avoiding Plagiarism: [http://writing.mit.edu/wcc/avoidingplagiarism](http://writing.mit.edu/wcc/avoidingplagiarism)

Class Meetings and Reading Assignments

**Week One**

2/2. Introduction: Ages of Reason


2/4. Catholic Theology, Politics, and Atheism ca. 1700


**Week Two**
2/9. Newtonianism

1. Dobbs and Jacob, *Newton and the Culture of Newtonianism*, 3-37, 61-104.

2/11. The Leibniz-Clark Disputes

2. *“Excerpts, G.W. Leibniz and Samuel Clarke, Correspondence* (Indianapolis, 2000), 4-22.

Week Three

2/16. No Class – Presidents’ Day [Monday Schedule of Classes]

2/18. European Media ca. 1700: Books and Theater

1. First Paper Due

Week Four

2/23. Fontenelle: Science as Seduction

1. Fontenelle, *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*, 3-73

2/25. Writing Workshop

Week Five

3/2. *Encyclopédie I: The Structure of Knowledge*

1. *Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert,* *Preliminary Discourse*, all
2. *Encyclopédie*, Frontispiece and Explanation
3. *Encyclopédie*, “Tree of Knowledge”
3/4. Visit to the Maihaugen Gallery and the MIT Archives and Special Collections
   1. Rewrite of First Paper Due (half the class)

Week Six

3/9. Encyclopédie II: The Place of the Mechanical Arts


3/11. First Debate: “The editors, writers, and illustrators of the Encyclopédie were first and foremost committed to political democracy and economic equality.”

Week Seven

3/16. “Enlightened” Europe Imagines the Rest of the World


3/18. Introduction to Thomas Jefferson and the Enlightenment in the Americas

1. Second Paper Due

SPRING VACATION, MARCH 22-26

Week Eight

3/30. Thomas Jefferson I
1. *Read the English translation of the Encyclopedia article “Virginia” online: [http://www.hti.umich.edu/d/did/](http://www.hti.umich.edu/d/did/)

4/1. **Thomas Jefferson II**


**Week Nine**

4/6. **French Revolution I: The Ideals of 1789**

2. *“Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen”* (1789)
3. *“Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen”* (1791)
4. *“The Constitution of 1791”*

4/8. **French Revolution II: The Lessons of 1793-1794**

4. **Rewrite of First or Second Paper Due (half the class)**

**Week Ten**

4/13. **Haitian Revolution I: The Slave Uprising of 1791**

2. *Documents on the Slave Uprising of 1791*, in Dubois and Geggus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 86-107*
3. *“Inside the Insurgency: Gros’s Historick Recital,” in Jeremy D. Popkin, Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (University of Chicago
4/15. Haitian Revolution II: 1804 and Beyond

2. *Haitian Constitution of 1801
3. *The Haitian Declaration of Independence, 1804
4. *The Haitian Constitution, 1805

Week Eleven

4/20. Patriots Day – No Class

4/22. Second Debate: The Atlantic Revolutions at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century did NOT lead to more political freedom and material equality for people in Europe and the Americas”

Week Twelve

4/27. The Political Backlash: Conservatism


4/29. The Cultural Backlash: Romanticism

1. *Warren Breckman, “Introduction: A Revolution in Culture,” in European Romanticism: A Brief History with Documents (Bedford/St Martin’s, 2008), 1-41

Week Thirteen

2. Optional: browse the “Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy” site on Mill at http://www.iep.utm.edu/m/milljs.htm

5/6. An Industrial Revolution, or an Industrious One?


Week Fourteen

5/11. Marx

1. *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, all. (Consult online or buy your own copy. There are many cheap editions available new and used.)

5/13. Conclusion

1. Paper 3 Due

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NO FINAL EXAMINATION