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 and a half centuries between 1600 and 1850, 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, theater, music, politics, and culture more generally, we will consider evolution and revolution in these two and a half centuries. We will also attend to those who opposed change on both traditional and radical grounds.

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 two five-page papers and one ten-page paper during the term. The first essay will be discussed in class and revised before a final grade is assigned. In addition, to satisfy the CI-H speaking requirement, we will stage the trial of Louis XVI in class on April 12; students will be assigned a character and expected to participate in the trial. 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two 5-page essays</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-page essay</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral Exercise (Trial of Louis XVI)</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<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’ on the course website.

René Descartes, Discourse on Method
Voltaire, Treatise on Tolerance
Laurent Dubois and John Garrigus, eds. Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804

**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>
- Avoiding Plagiarism: <http://writing.mit.edu/wcc/avoidingplagiarism>

**Class Meetings and Reading Assignments**

**Week One**

2/6. Introduction: Ages of Reason

2/8. Demography, Geography, Material Life, 1600-1850

**Week Two**

2/13. The End of the Renaissance? Galileo’s 1633 Trial
1. *The Making of the West*, 509-20
3. Galileo, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, excerpt (to be handed out in class)


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2/15. The Cartesian Method

1. René Descartes, *The Discourse on Method*, all


3. Optional: browse the “Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy” site on Descartes at [http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/d/descarte.htm](http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/d/descarte.htm)

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Week Three

2/20. No Class – Monday Schedule of Classes Held

2/22. English Radicalism and The Trial of Charles I, 1647-1649

1. *The Making of the West*, 540-7


4. First Paper Due

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Week Four

2/27. English Solutions, 1660-1700


4. Browse the Newton Project web site: [http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/](http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/)

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3/1. Writing Workshop
Week Five

3/6. The Radical Enlightenment
   3. * The Treatise of the Three Impostors, in Margaret Jacob, ed. The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents (Bedford/St Martins, 2001), 94-114

3/8. Louis XIV, Versailles, and the Culture of Absolutism
   1. Rewrite of First Paper Due

3/10. Visit to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts

Week Six


3/15. The Public Sphere and the Encyclopedia of Diderot & d’Alembert
   1. The Making of the West, 552-63, 600-5.
   3. * Browse the online web site for English translations of Encyclopedia articles: http://www.hti.umich.edu/d/did/; read “Sunday,” and “Philosopher.”

Week Seven

3/20. Tolerance: An Enlightenment Ideal?
   1. Voltaire, Treatise on Tolerance, 3-105.
3/22. The Persistence of the Old Regime and the Problem of Slavery
   1. Second Paper Due

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SPRING VACATION, MARCH 26-30
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Week Eight

4/3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau
   1. The Social Contract, excerpts, in Margaret Jacob, ed. The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents (Bedford/St Martins, 2001), 177-201.
   2. Optional: browse the “Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy” site on Rousseau at http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/rousseau.htm

4/5. Revolution in France I
   1. The Making of the West, 747-52

Week Nine

4/10. Revolution in France II
   1. The Making of the West, 752-73

4/12. The Trial of Louis XVI  [N.B.: We will hold two class sessions this day.]
   • 11-12:30 PM: Assignments to be distributed in class
   • 7-8:30 PM: Assignments to be distributed in class

Week Ten

4/17. Patriots Day – No Class

4/19. From Saint Domingue to Haiti
   1. The Making of the West, review 567-77
   2. Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804, 7-40, 86-166, 188-96
Week Eleven


Week Twelve

5/1. Romanticism
1. *The Making of the West*, 723-6

5/3. Conservatism Created: A Response to Reason and Revolution
1. *The Making of the West*, 714-23

Week Thirteen

1. *The Making of the West*, review 714-23

5/10. The Revolutions of 1848 and *The Communist Manifesto*
Week Fourteen

5/15. Darwin & Christian Theology (or, Galileo Revisited)

5/17. Conclusion
   1. Ten-Page paper due

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NO FINAL EXAMINATION
21H.433 The Age of Reason: Europe from the 17th to the Early 19th Centuries
Spring 2011

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