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 early 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 3/10 and 4/21; 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:

- Class Participation 20 points
- Three 7-page essays 50 points each, 150 points total
- Class Debates 30 points
- TOTAL 200 points

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.

Kathryn A. Edwards & Susie Speakman Sutch, eds. Leonarde’s Ghost: Popular Piety and “The Appearance of a Spirit” in 1628
René Descartes, Discourse on Method (Hackett, 1998, 3rd ed.)
Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs and Margaret C. Jacob, Newton and the Culture of Newtonianism
Julien Offray de la Mettrie, Man a Machine (Hackett, 1994)

**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**

2/1. Introduction

2/3. Witchcraft and Magic

3. OPTIONAL: Hunt, 468-76.

**Week Two**

2/8. *Leonarde’s Ghost*

2/10. No Class (Instructor out of town)

**Week Three**

2/15. *The Cartesian Insight*
   1. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, all.

2/17. *Cartesianism in the Seventeenth Century*
   1. First Paper Due

**Week Four**

2/22. No Class – Presidents’ Day [Monday Schedule of Classes]

2/24. Writing Workshop

**Week Five**

3/1. *English Radicalism and The Trial of Charles I, 1647-1649*
   1. *The Making of the West*, 540-7
   4. OPTIONAL: Hunt, 497-504.
3/3. 1688 in England
3. Rewrite of First Paper Due (half the class)

3/5. Visit to the MFA
1. Details to be announced in class

Week Six

3/8. Newtonianism
1. Dobbs and Jacob, Newton and the Culture of Newtonianism, 3-104.

3/10. First Debate
1. Details to be announced in class

Week Seven

3/15. State and Art in the Dutch Golden Age

3/17. Spinozism and the Idea of a “Radical” Enlightenment

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SPRING VACATION, MARCH 21-25
Week Eight

3/29. Enlightenment France
1. Second Paper Due

3/31. Voltaire Goes to England, and Persians Come to Paris

Week Nine

4/5. Are Men Machines? Are Machines Alive?
1. Julien Offray de la Mettrie, Man a Machine, 20-76

4/7. 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”

Week Ten

4/12. Encyclopédie II: The Place of the Mechanical Arts (Visit to MIT’s Rare Books and Special Collections Room)
2. Rewrite of First or Second Paper Due (half the class)

Week Eleven

4/19. Patriots Day – No Class

4/21. Second Debate
   1. Details to be announced in class

Week Twelve

4/26. 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)


Week Thirteen

5/3. The Political Backlash: Conservatism

3. *Joseph de Maistre, Considerations on France*, excerpts in *University of Chicago*
Readings in Western Civilization, Vol. 7: The Old Regime and the French Revolution

5/5. The Cultural Backlash: Romanticism
1. *William Wordsworth, Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting The Banks Of The Wye During A Tour. July 13, 1798,

Week Fourteen


5/12. Conclusion
1. Paper 3 Due

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No Final Exam