THE EUROPEAN ENLIGHTENMENT:
REASON AND REVOLUTION IN 18TH CENTURY THOUGHT

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Stanford University Continuing Studies
Fall Term 2016

Location: Stanford University campus
Schedule: 26 September – 12 December 2016 (no classes 17 October and 21 November),
Mondays, 7:00-8:50PM

Course Objectives & a Note from the instructor:

*Enlightenment* is regarded as the unique gift of eighteenth-century European thought to the
continuing project of human advancement in science, philosophy, secularization, and political
emancipation. Yet, having survived two world wars, a chastened twentieth century has had to raise
vital questions, asking if there are limitations to Enlightenment thought, and even sometimes
suggesting that the overall effect of the Enlightenment’s main projects has been detrimental to
individuals, societies and environments.

This course asks you to confront the “Enlightenment project” by considering its moments of triumph
as well as self-doubts and investigating possible shortcomings intrinsic to those moments. After
locating its origins in British culture of the early eighteenth century by looking to the debate between
Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz, the Augustan culture of Alexander Pope, and the empiricist
philosophies of George Berkeley and David Hume, the course follows the impact of that body of
British thought on Voltaire’s efforts to rejuvenate and modernize French culture after an age of
absolutism, Denis Diderot’s grand project of the Encyclopedia, and the self-critique of the
Enlightenment by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The course then assesses the increasing radicalization of
Enlightenment ideas toward the outbreak of the French Revolution, concluding with an assessment
of Immanuel Kant’s Critical Philosophy and the example of revolutionary ideas in Mary
Wollstonecraft’s writings on feminist suffrage. The course concludes by measuring the ultimate pros
and cons of the European Enlightenment for the future development of modern ideas.

**PREREQUISITES**

Although there are no prerequisites, some general background in modern European history is
assumed.

**COURSE CREDIT**

No Grade Requested: This is the default option. Just show up for class!

Students taking the course for Pass/Not Pass must attend at least eight of the ten sessions and take a
final examination.
Students taking the course for Letter grade must attend at least eight of the ten sessions, take a final examination, and submit a term paper of 8-11 pages.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1**  
**Introductory Lecture: What is "Enlightenment"?**

**Week 2**  
**Newtonianism and Enlightenment Cosmology**
Text: *The Leibniz-Clark Correspondence*
Discussion of the impact of the Newtonian system and the growing prominence of the Newtonian revolution for a new cosmology and world-view. The rise of Newtonianism in the English centers and the emergence of societies of scientists. The nature of the debate between Newton (represented by Samuel Clarke) and Leibniz on key issues of Newtonianism. Who is correct? Newton and the Einsteinian revolution of the twentieth century. Discussion of the stakes in the debate. The relation between science, technology and religion in Augustan England.

**Week 3**  
**Pope: The Philosophy of Augustan Humanism; British Empiricism and the Skepticism of David Hume**
Text: Pope, *An Essay on Man*

**Week 4**  
**Voltaire: Creating the “Philosophe”**
Voltaire, *Candide*
Lecture on the state of French society at the end of Louis XIV's reign and the Regency interregnum. The rise of the concept of "Western civilization." Account of Voltaire's early career and visit to England: the Anglo-French rapprochement. Discussion of *Candide* and its relation to the debate on optimism and theodicy. On *Candide* as the oeuvre of a *philosophe*. On *Candide* as a genre of literature and philosophy: the picaresque and the parodic. Discussion on the radical implications in
Voltaire's dictum to "cultivate one's garden." Voltaire's later career: "écrasez l'infame."

Week 5  
**Diderot: The Philosophe as Genius, Enlightenment and Materialism**  
Text: Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew* and *D'Alembert's Dream*  
Lecture on the state of knowledge and the empirical sciences at mid-century: the project of the *Encyclopédie*. The new Enlightenment radicalism: La Mettrie, d'Holbach, Condillac, Helvétius. The emergence of philosophical materialism and political economy. Discussion of Diderot's contributions to the "party" of the philosophes. Consideration of *Rameau's Nephew* as the presentation of a new kind of individual: the artist, the genius, the bohemian. Discussion of *D'Alembert's Dream* as a philosophy of materialism. Evolution and Diderot's approach to nature. Consideration of the role of dream and reality in Diderot's writing as a genre. Discussion of Diderot's approach toward gender distinctions and sexuality. Overall reflections on the course of the French Enlightenment after Diderot. Comparison with other Continental developments.

Week 6  
**Rousseau: The Return of the Public Dimension**  
Text: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*  

Week 7  
**Rousseau: Beyond the Public Dimension**  
Text: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*  

Week 8  
**Kant: The Critical Philosophy of the Enlightenment**  
General discussion of Kant's moral theory in the *Groundwork*. Consideration of Part I: conventional and philosophical approaches to morality.

**Week 9**  
**Kant: The Categorical Imperative as the Pathos of Freedom**  
Text: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Parts II, III. Discussion of Part II of the *Groundwork*: the concept of "ought" and the categorical imperative. Consideration of Kant's examples. Discussion of Kant's view on the rational being and humanity as ends in themselves: the Kingdom of Nature and the Kingdom of Ends. Discussion of Part III: Kant's Idea of Freedom and his system of critical philosophy: appearances and things in themselves, the intelligible and sensible worlds. The concept of pure spontaneity. Overall consideration of the validity and limitations of Kant's theory. Kant's influence on Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education* in terms of the challenge of the French Revolution in German-speaking Europe. Kant and the rise of German philosophical idealism: Fichte, Schelling, Hegel.

**Week 10**  
**The Legacy of the Enlightenment: Revolution and Counterrevolution**  
Text: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*  