

Contemporary Civilization
Spring 2012, Section 13
Monday and Wednesday, 11-12:50
306 Hamilton Hall

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Office Hours: Wednesday, 2-4 (IAB 270)

Last semester we saw a great many solutions to the perennial question, “What is the good life? How should we live?” Some argued that we must submit ourselves absolutely to God, others that we should act politically to cultivate our virtue, others that we should submit ourselves to the sovereign state. As the early modern period gave way to the modernity that we still, in some sense, inhabit, new sets of questions and answers arose, conditioned by stunning innovations in technology and culture. The thinkers that we’ll discuss this semester dedicated themselves to questions that are recognizably our own: how can we still be free in an enormous, or imperialist, society? How can we protect our virtue when we are forced to participate in an unfair and violent society? While the modern project has brought many benefits, who has been left out and why?

The basic narrative we’ll follow this semester is a simple one: we’ll begin with revolutions in ethical-political thought—a complex constellation of ideas known as the Enlightenment—and the political revolutions they underwrote. We’ll move then to a constellation of thinkers who defended this new arrangement, including the democratic politics, imperialism, and capitalism that made it possible. In the second section of the course, we’ll confront a series of radical critics of this bourgeois, commercial society: to what extent, they ask, is it based on unrecognized violence, against the poor, racial minorities, women, or even (as with Nietzsche and Freud) ourselves?

Details and Course Requirements

This is a seminar, organized around discussion. The most important course requirement is that you do the reading and that you come to class prepared to discuss it. CC is a group effort, and the experiment will only succeed if everyone participates. Given the nature of the course, attendance is mandatory, and all absences will be noted. If you have a reason to be absent, let me know as far in advance as possible. If you are ill, a doctor’s note is absolutely required.

In addition to classroom discussion, two other forms of participation are required, both on Courseworks. You will each be assigned a day on which you are to be the “expert.” There is no presentation component, but you will be expected to have done the reading especially closely on that day, and to help me facilitate discussion. Within one week of the class, and drawing on class discussion, you will e-mail me a review sheet, which I will post on Courseworks (this should be no more than 2 pages). When these are compiled, it will serve as the review sheet for the midterm and final exam. Your document will have either three or four portions, each one paragraph long. First, a brief introduction to the author, including his biographical details and some historical context. This should only be done if you are the first “expert” on the particular author (if there are multiple authors, discuss them all in a single paragraph and sacrifice detail). Second, a brief summary of the day’s reading. There is no space for in-depth analysis, so only include the main ideas that were

discussed in class (you are encouraged to note controversies!). In this paragraph you should define at least two key, new concepts, putting them in **bold** in the document. Third, a connection of the author to the course as a whole: how does he connect, historically and intellectually, to other authors? To whom is he responding, and in what way? For this last paragraph, you could also draw on texts from Lit Hum.

There will also be an ongoing discussion on Courseworks. Directly after class each day, I will post a series of questions about the next session's readings. Eight times over the course of the semester, you will be responsible for responding to one of these questions in a well-developed post, including at least one citation from the text (at least 250 words). You may also choose to respond to another student's response instead of responding directly to my own questions; you can also, if you wish, write something of your own, without responding to my prompt (this is your chance to guide class discussion). Feel free to be creative here. These will be due at midnight the night before each class.

You will be asked to write two 1500-2000 word essays (5-7 pages). These will be due on February 22 and April 30. In each case, a thesis statement is due to me via e-mail beforehand (on February 15 and April 23, respectively). Drafts or partial drafts may be submitted along with the thesis statement, but no later. Papers submitted late, without prior approval, will be docked one grade level per day (i.e. from an A- to a B+).

You are highly discouraged from using laptop computers; if you wish to use them, turn off the wireless function. You are not permitted to browse the internet during class.

Note on plagiarism: I take plagiarism extremely seriously, and will not be lenient with those found guilty. It is far better to turn in a mediocre paper than to plagiarize: the former will hurt your grade but, if caught, the latter will jeopardize your academic career. There is little need to use secondary sources in this course, but if you choose to use them, they must be properly cited. If you have any questions about this—that is, if you are not sure whether or not a certain act constitutes plagiarism—ask me about this before turning in your paper.

Here is the official policy on plagiarism, which I will follow: “Columbia College is dedicated to the highest ideals of integrity in academia. Therefore, in Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization, any instance of academic dishonesty, attempted or actual, will be reported to the faculty chair of the course and to the dean of the Core Curriculum, who will review the case with the expectation that a student guilty of academic dishonesty will receive the grade of "F" in the course and be referred to dean's discipline for further institutional action.”

Assessment

40%: Class Participation, Attendance, Courseworks

30%: Papers (15% per paper)

10%: Midterm

20%: Final (cumulative)

Required Texts

The following texts are available at Columbia University Bookstore, Book Culture, and on reserve at Butler Library. Do not buy the shrink-wrapped book pack. Books with an asterisk are available only at Book Culture, in the coursebooks section. I have also listed the ISBN for each in case you want to order them online. You should always bring the day's texts with you to class.

Hume, *An Enquiry into the Principles of Morals* (9780915145454)
Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (9780521626958)
Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings* (9780872200470)
Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (9780679783367)
Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (9780140447606)
Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (9780199535736)
The Marx-Engels Reader (9780393090406)
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (9780679724629)
The Freud Reader (9780393314038)*
Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (9780679752554)*
Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (9780486280417)
Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (9781583670255)*
Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (9780679724513)*
Woolf, *Three Guineas* (9780156901772)

Provisional Course Schedule

18 January: Introduction: Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”

Autonomy and the Ethics of Enlightenment

23 January: Hume, *An Enquiry into the Principles of Morals*, 13-82

25 January: Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Part I (and Part II if you are interested)

30 January: Thinking about Morality with Hume and Kant [no reading, but listen to this:
<http://www.radiolab.org/2007/aug/13/>]

1 February: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*

6 February: Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*

Bourgeois Revolution

8 February: American Revolutionary Texts; French Revolutionary Texts [both on CC Web]
<Paper 1 topics circulated>

13 February: Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book I (Chapters 1-4, 7-8), Book II (Chapter 3), and skim Book IV (Chapters 1-2)

15 February: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Introduction; Part 1, chaps. 2-4; Part 2, chaps. 6-7, chapter 9 (only 336-52)
<Paper 1 thesis statements due>

20 February: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, Preface; Part 1, chaps. 1-2, 5, 20; Part 2, chaps. 1-2, 4-5, 13, 17; Part 3, chap. 19; Part 4, chaps. 1-3, 6-8

22 February: J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*
<PAPER 1 DUE>

27 February: Midterm

Thinking Critically about Modernity (I): Struggle

29 February: Marx, "On the Jewish Question" [Marx-Engels Reader]

5 March: Marx, *The German Ideology* [Marx-Engels Reader]

7 March: Marx, portions of *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *Communist Manifesto* [70-81, 469-91 in Marx-Engels Reader]

19 March: Darwin, *Origin of Species* [selections available on Courseworks]

21 March: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1

26 March: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Essays 2-3

28 March: NO CLASS

2 April: Freud, excerpts from his work on dreams and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* [Freud Reader, 129-72, 239-92]

4 April: Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* [Freud reader]

9 April: Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 3-31, 170-194

11 April: Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 195-228

Thinking Critically about Modernity (II): Exclusions

16 April: Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*

<Paper 2 topics circulated>

18 April: Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

23 April: Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, Introduction, Book I, Chapter I (pp. 3-10, 22-33), Chapter II, Chapter IV, Chapter IX, Chapter XI

<Paper 2 thesis statement due>

25 April: Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, Book II, chapters XII, XIII, XVIII

Conclusion: Taking Stock of Modernity

30 April: Woolf, *Three Guineas*

<PAPER 2 DUE>