Modern Political Thought

Professor Nicholas Tampio
Fordham University, POGA 5301
Spring 2009
Class: Faber Hall 668, T 5:30-7:20 pm
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Course Overview

How should we think about morality and politics today? That question inspired the great European philosophers of the 17th and 18th Centuries and continues to motivate political theorists. The aim of this course is to follow several of the key debates within the Enlightenment to sharpen our own thinking about contemporary politics.

The course begins with the dispute between Kant and Hamann over the meaning and legitimacy of the Enlightenment. Then, we turn to Spinoza and Leibniz battling over whether politics and religion should be separated or intertwined. Next, we follow the conversation between Hume and Kant over whether passions or reason should guide practical judgment. The course then jumps to the contemporary feud between Foucault and Habermas over the Enlightenment’s legacy. Finally, we consider the possibility of an Islamic Enlightenment. By navigating these debates, we clarify and enrich our own political thinking.

Texts

What is Enlightenment?, ed. James Schmidt (California 1996)
Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge 2007)
Leibniz, Political Writings, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge 1998)
Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals (Cambridge 1996)
Critique and Power, ed Michael Kelly (MIT 1994)

Course Requirements

1. Class participation. Students are expected to come to class on time and prepared to discuss the readings.

2, 3, 4. Class presentation, paper, and handout. Early in the semester, we will assign students to lead discussion for one class. Write a 8-10-page paper describing the context of the book (especially if you are the first one presenting on an author) and the argument of the assigned readings. Highlight key passages of the argument and describe recent controversies over the
work. For the class, distribute a one-page handout (with key dates, quotes, diagrams, arguments, and critiques), speak for about 20 minutes, and lead class discussion. This seminar gives you the chance to hone the art of teaching.

5. First paper: Write a 8-10 page essay comparing and contrasting Spinoza’s and Leibniz’s political theories. This essay should contextualize the debate between Spinoza and Leibniz, explain their similarities and differences, and explain why this debate still matters today.

6. Second paper: Write a 8-10 page essay either (1) comparing and contrasting Hume’s and Kant’s political theories, (2) comparing and contrasting Habermas’s and Foucault’s interpretations of the Enlightenment, or (3) interpreting An-Naim’s project to secularize Islam in light of the European Enlightenment.

Grade Distribution
Class participation 10
Class presentation 10
Class presentation paper 20
Handout 10
First paper 20
Second paper 30

1. January 13 – What is Enlightenment?: The Kant-Hamann Debate

   Readings from *What is Enlightenment?*, Part I, including:
   - Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”
   - Hamann, “Letter to Christian Jacob Kraus” and “Metacritique on the Purism of Reason”

2. January 20 – Spinoza’s Theology

   Theological-Political Treatise, Introduction-Chapter 15

3. January 27 – Spinoza’s Politics

   Theological-Political Treatise, Chapter 16-20

4. February 3 – Leibniz’s Politics

   *Political Writings*, Parts I and II

5. February 10 – Leibniz’s Theology

   *Political Writings*, Parts VI and VII

6. February 17 – The Spinoza-Leibniz Controversy

   *The Courtier and the Heretic*, Entire
7. February 24 – First Paper Due (May be submitted electronically by 5:30 pm); No class

8. March 3 – Hume’s Aim

*Treatise of Human Nature*, Introduction, Book 1

9. March 10 – Hume’s Morality

*Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 2

10. March 17 – Hume’s Politics

*Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 3

11. March 24 – Kant’s Aim

*Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface, Introduction to the Metaphysics of Morals

12. March 31 – Kant’s Politics

*Metaphysics of Morals*, Part I

13. April 7 – Kant’s Morality

*Metaphysics of Morals*, Part II

14. April 14 – Foucault on the Enlightenment

Foucault’s essays in *Critique and Power*

15. April 21 – Habermas on the Enlightenment

Habermas’s essays in *Critique and Power*

16. April 28 – An Islamic Enlightenment?

Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim, *Islam and the Secular State*, Preface, Chapters 1, 2, 3, Conclusion

17. May 5 – Final Paper Due (May be submitted electronically by 5:30 pm); No class
Additional Readings

“As a set of political, economic, social, institutional, and cultural events on which we still depend in large part, the Enlightenment constitutes a privileged domain for analysis.” Foucault’s point is that nearly everything we think, feel, and do has been shaped at a profound level by the European Enlightenment. This thesis finds confirmation throughout academia, as philosophers, political scientists, humanities professors, economists, historians, and natural scientists, with varying degrees of self-awareness, take up the mantle of the Enlightenment. This course addresses several of the most important conversations within modern political thought. I encourage you to keep up with the most recent contributions to those debates, particularly for the authors on whom you present. Here are a few of the more prominent recent studies of the authors and themes we consider this semester.

The Enlightenment


Leibniz


**Spinoza**


**Kant**


**Hume**


Habermas


Foucault


Foucault, Michel and Roberto Nigro. *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*. Cambridge, Mass; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2008.


Islamic Political Thought


