

Reason, Secularization & Multiculturalism

Module Description

This module investigates three sets of questions. While they may seem unrelated at the surface, they all invite us to reflect on the positive and negative legacy of the historical doctrine of “empiricism” (a theory which states that all knowledge comes from the senses). This doctrine, in large part, came out of the scientific revolution of the 17th century and emphasized the importance of observation and experiment in the investigation of the natural world. These three sets of questions are:

1. Can reason and empiricist science prove that religious faith is irrational? Once we get rid of God, what do we appeal to in distinguishing right from wrong: our biological nature, sentiments, reason or traditions?
2. Do humans have the right to dominate and exploit nature? How do we draw the line between what we can and cannot do (for example, in the case of genetic engineering or environmental development)?
3. Does “race” exist as a biological category or social construct? Can racial differences be scientifically established and still be compatible with multicultural aspirations?

These three sets of questions, which are still much debated today, actually arose in the Age of Enlightenment, an 18th century intellectual movement so important that it shaped the modern West, and arguably, much of the rest of the world. We will examine whether and how principles involved in selective central Enlightenment debates are still operative in our age. The module does not aim only at exploring historical intellectual currents, but also at understanding our present concerns and projects from a historical perspective.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

[\(Please see the most current version of the syllabus on IVLE.\)](#)

Unit I Introduction

Week 1

- Class 1 Introduction
- Class 2 Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" pp.41-48
Kramnick, "Introduction" to *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, pp.ix-xxvi

Unit II Secularization, Science and Morality

Week 2 Contemporary Atheism

Class 1 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp.137-189

Class 2 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp.190-267

Week 3 Enlightenment Atheism

Class 1 Voltaire, "Candide," pp.3-88 (satirical novella)

Class 2 Hume, "Of Miracles," pp.72-90

Week 4 Enlightenment Materialism

Class 1 Diderot, "D'Alembert's Dream," pp.89-175

Class 2 Diderot, "Supplement to Bougainville's 'Voyage,'" pp.177-228 (imaginary travelogue)

Week 5 Critique of Enlightenment Secularization

Class 1 Larmore, "Beyond Religion and Enlightenment," pp.41-64

Class 2 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp.1-22

Paper 1 due at the end of the Week

Unit III Secularization and Anthropocentrism

Week 6 Genetic Engineering

Class 1 Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection: What's wrong with designer children, bionic athletes, and genetic engineering?”
Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection*, pp.79-83, 92-97

Class 2 Paper 1 Workshop

Recess Week

Week 7 Anthropocentrism in the Enlightenment

Class 1 Bacon, *Novum Organum*, pp.5-13, 102-09

Class 2 Descartes, excerpts from “Discourse on the Method,” Part V, pp.131-40
Descartes, excerpts from “Correspondence,” pp.302-04, 365-67

Week 8 Impact on the Academia

Class 1 Wokler, Robert, “Anthropology and Conjectural History in the Enlightenment,”
31-52

Class 2 Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” pp.129-156

Week 9 Impact on the Academia

Class 1 Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” pp.129-156

Unit IV. “Race” and Multiculturalism: Compatible or Contradictory?

Week 9 Problems of the Notion of Race

- Class 2 Appiah, *Race, Culture, Identity*, Part I, “Analysis: Against Races,” 53-101
- Week 10 Natural History and the Origin of “Race”
- Class 1 Linné, *A General System of Nature* Vol. 1, 2-9
Buffon, *Natural History* Vol 4, “Of the Varieties of Human Species” (TBD)
- Class 2 Blumenbach, “On the Natural Variety of Mankind”
Sloan, “The Gaze of Natural History,” 112-151
- Week 11 Arguments for and against the Scientific Conception of Race
- Class 1 Lewontin, “The Apportionment of Human Diversity,” 381-98
- Class 2 Hacking, “Why Race Still Matters?” 102-16
Kitcher, “Does ‘Race’ Have a Future?” 293-317
- Week 12 Kant on Race and Cosmopolitanism
- Class 1 Kant, “On the Different Human Races,” 3-22
Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” pp.107-111, 115-118 only
- Class 2 Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” pp.107-111, 115-118 only
Hedrick, “Race, Difference and Anthropology in Kant’s Cosmopolitanism,”
245-68
- Week 13 Paper 2
- Class 1 In-class Workshop
- Class 2 One-on-one Meetings

Paper 2 due in Week 15

Articles on IVLE

- Appiah, Anthony. "Part I Analysis: Against Races." *Race, Culture, Identity*. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values. Delivered at the University of California, San Diego. 53-101.
- Bacon, Francis. *Novum Organum*. The Online Library of Liberty. http://files.libertyfund.org/files/1432/Bacon_0415_EBk_v6.0.pdf
- Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich. *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach: De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa*. 1795. Ed. and Trans. Thomas Bendyshe. Published for the Anthropological Society of London by Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1865.
- Buffon. *Natural History*. Vol 4. London: Printed for the Proprietor, and sold by H. D. Symonds, 1807.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006.
- Descartes, Rene. "Discourse on the Method." *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. I. Ed. & trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. 131-40.
- . "Correspondence." *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. II. Ed. & trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. 302-04, 365-67.
- Diderot, Denis. "D'Alembert's Dream." *Rameau's Nephew, and Other Works*. Trans. Jacques Barzun and Ralph Henry Bowen. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001. PP. 89-175.
- . "Supplement to Bougainville's 'Voyage.'" *Rameau's Nephew, and Other Works*. PP.177-228.
- Hacking, Ian. "Why Race Still Matters?" *Daedalus*. 134.1 (Winter, 2005): 102-16.
- Hedrick, Todd. "Race, Difference and Anthropology in Kant's Cosmopolitanism." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 46. 2 (2008): 245-68.
- Hume, David. "Of Miracles." *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. 72-90.
- Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. Trans. Ted Humphrey. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983. 41-48.
- . "On the Different Human Races." *The Idea of Race*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000. 3-22.
- . "Perpetual Peace." *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. 107-43.
- Kass, Leon. "Wisdom of Repunance." *The Ethics of Cloning*. Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1998. 3-59.
- Kitcher, Philip. "Does 'Race' Have a Future?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 35.4 (2007): 293-317.
- Kramnick, Issac, ed. *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*. Penguin, 1995. ix-xxiv.

- Lewontin, Richard. "The Apportionment of Human Diversity." *Evolutionary Biology*. 6(1972): 381-98
- Linné, Charles. *A General System of Nature*. Vol. 1. London: Lackington, Allen & Co, 1802. 2-9.
- Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Civil Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. 285-302.
- Sandel, Michael. "The Case Against Perfection: What's wrong with designer children, bionic athletes, and genetic engineering?" *The Atlantic*. April 2004.
- . *The Case Against Perfection*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. 79-83, 92-97.
- Sloan, Philip. "The Gaze of Natural History." *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*. Ed. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter & Robert Wokkler. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995. 112-51.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2007. 1-22.
- Weber, Max. "Science as a Vocation." *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Trans. & Ed. H.H. Gerth & C Wright Mills. New York: OUP, 1946. 129-156.
- Wokler, Robert. "Anthropology and Conjectural History in the Enlightenment." *Inventing Human Science*. 31-52.

Requirements

1. **Papers 1 and 2 (40%):** Students have to write two short papers of about 1500 words each.
2. **Short Papers (25%):**
 - for some of the class sessions (for precise number, please see syllabus on IVLE), students have to come up with one good and interesting question on the readings (no more than 30 words). They then have to succinctly sketch out an answer to their own question (250-300 words).
 - In answering your own question, you need to propose a claim which you will then defend. You need to provide reasons for the validity of your claim, in other words. Please make sure that your question is not so broad you cannot meaningfully answer it within 250-300 words.
 - It is best to treat these short papers as miniature essays, in which you argue for a thesis, which in turn is your answer to the question your short papers investigate.
 - your short papers will be graded on their **thoughtfulness, precision and conciseness**. Please make sure that both your question and answer are precisely and concisely articulated.
3. **Class Participation (15%):** Assessed by classroom contributions.

4. **Facilitation of Class Discussion (20%):** students will be facilitating the class discussion for one time during the semester either by themselves or in groups of two. Each student is responsible for about 30 minutes of the class time and will need to meet with the instructor before the class. Detailed instructions will be given in a separate handout.
5. Attendance: only **three absences** are allowed, whether excused or unexcused. Four absences may result in a grade deduction.

Additional Notes

If you have any questions at any point in the semester, please feel free to come see me or email me. Please be precise and concise in your email, and give me twenty-four hours to respond. If you would like to speak with me in person, please write to me and make an appointment in advance. Do not just stop by. I may not be in my office.