200-02 Philosophical Perspectives: Science, Technology and Society

Timothy Quinn
quinnt@xavier.edu

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Course Description

The Enlightenment was a philosophical movement that introduced notions of liberal democracy, scientific advancement, and civil and natural right into Western thought. It also culminated in the greatest moral fiasco of the twentieth century: the Shoah, or Holocaust. Hence, our question for the semester: is there an essential link between Enlightenment and anti-Semitism? To explore this question, we will read together works of Enlightenment philosophers, both Christian and Jewish, to note their places of agreement as well as their points of antipathy. What we hope to gain from this reading is, among other things, an appreciation of the role religion plays in philosophical reflection, especially reflection about the nature of justice and the good.

Also, since this course is part of the Xavier Core Curriculum, it aims, along with the rest of Xavier’s core, to develop learned and reflective souls. This course addresses the following core curriculum learning objective at an intermediate level: “Students recognize and cogently discuss significant questions in the humanities, arts, and the natural and social sciences.”

Finally, keep in mind throughout the semester that this course is an invitation to take your place in a long tradition of reflection on the meaning of our shared humanity, of the world, and of our relation to it. In the final analysis, the goal of the liberal arts is liberate you, to set your soul free to think and to act and to care thoughtfully for the sake of the world.

Texts

Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett)

Spinoza, Baruch. *Theological Political Treatise* (Hackett)

Mendelssohn, Moses. *Jerusalem* (Brandeis University Press)

Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Nathan the Wise* (St. Martin’s Press)

In addition, you’ll be responsible for any material handed out in class or through Canvas.

Assignments and Grading

Assignments: mid-term exam (20%), final exam (20%), two essays (20% each), 4 quizzes (5% each).
Quizzes: These will be based upon the reading for a given day.

Mid-Term Exam: The mid-term exam will take place on Monday, October 17. It will be essay in format, and will be preceded by a class dedicated to review for the exam.

Final Exam: The final exam will cover material from the second half of the semester. Like the mid-term, it will be essay in format. The final class of the semester will be dedicated to review for the final.

Essays: The essays are to be 5 to 7 pages in length, and will address topics drawn from the readings. The first essay, on Descartes and/or Spinoza, will be due Monday, October 10. The second essay, on Mendelssohn and/or Spinoza and/or Lessing, will be due Monday, December 5.

Class Participation: The mode of philosophy is discussion. Since this class is a seminar, regular class attendance and participation are necessary. Without them, it is not possible to receive an “A” for the course. More than 3 unexcused absences drop your grade one letter grade; more than 6 results in failure for the course.

Office Hours: Drop in Monday and Wednesday, 1:00 –3:00, or any time I’m in and you’re free.

A note on electronics: Cell phones and computers are not allowed in the class, and will be destroyed on sight.

Schedule

Aug. 22: Introduction

Aug. 24—Sept. 16: Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (entire)


Preface, chapters 1—7; 13; 16—20.

Mid-Term Exam: Monday, October 17

Oct. 19—Nov. 11: Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem* (entire)

Nov. 14—Dec. 7: Lessing, *Nathan the Wise* (entire, with the following essays):

1. Johann Andrea Eisenmenger, *Jewry Revealed*, 1700

Dec. 9: Review
Final Exam: Wednesday, Dec. 14, 8:00-8:50

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Office Hours: Drop in any time.

A note on electronics: Cell phones and computers are not allowed in the class, and will be destroyed on sight.

GRADING STANDARDS

The Philosophy Department has adopted the following standards for evaluation of all written work:

A= work that not merely fully and accurately reproduces class discussion, the main thread in an argument or the main philosophical significance of a text under discussion, but which goes beyond these and indicates a contribution of the student, giving evidence of a deeper understanding of the material in question.

B= work that shows a more or less complete and exact understanding of the issues, texts, and/or arguments as explained in class, clearly and logically formulated without going beyond such explanations.

C= work that shows basic understanding of the material but with errors, omissions and confusions of either a formal or material nature.

D= work that shows a minimal acquaintance with the material or serious logical and conceptual flaws in formulating responses to the question raised, the argument at issue, or to the philosophical text under discussion.

F= work that shows inadequate acquaintance with texts, issues, or ideas with little or no valid logical argumentation; or, the work is a plagiarism. In cases of plagiarism, which involve the use of published or other’s written work without giving credit, an F will be awarded for the semester and the student’s name reported to the Dean of the College.