

PAR 306: **Science, Reason & Autonomy in the Enlightenment**

Spring 2008

Malcontent for Moderns: Daryl L. Hale

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Course Description: Rejecting authority of tradition, both rationalists and empiricists, like Rene Descartes & Francis Bacon, inaugurate modern natural science by demanding new methods and principles of reasoning. (P4)

Historians of philosophy typically refer to the 17th & 18th centuries as 'Early Modern Philosophy'; others refer to this period as 'the Enlightenment'. Lately, medievalists as well as postmodernists take offense at these terms, presumably because they see either some implied denigration of medieval thinkers or because they prefer to belittle or dismiss the scientific, epistemological, ethical or political attainments of the early modern thinkers. Well, I will be so bold as to take the Enlightenment thinkers at their words, for they certainly envision themselves as making a radical break with all that has gone before them, and these philosophers see the discoveries of the early modern scientists as requiring complete re-conceptualization of human knowledge in all areas. Accordingly, the leading thinkers continually speak of the 'New Science' [**scientia**, **Wissenschaft**] that has been unearthed or is demanded by the **Naturforschern** [students of nature]. This means that the inherited medieval project of providing a true **scientia** of nature -- a systematic, interrelated body of demonstrative knowledge of real essences of substances -- must be completely reinterpreted, if not given up altogether. One way of constructing a new **scientia** of nature is to employ a new logic (that of induction), a new epistemology (one founded on sense observation, experiment, and rational reflection), new instruments (telescopes & microscopes), and a new method for establishing scientific generalizations (mathematical precision of laws of nature).

Both Francis Bacon and Renè Descartes proposed new methods that were intended to guarantee certain progress for science and philosophy. Accordingly, philosophical tradition divides the modern philosophers into two camps, the Continental rationalists and the British empiricists, but we shall find that this categorization is a bit too facile. For while it is true that rationalists like Descartes certainly stress the capacity of human reason to attain knowledge of the essences of things such as bodies and minds, he also emphasizes the importance of experiment and sense observation; similarly, a classic empiricist like John Locke focuses not only on sensation but also on the role of reason in our arriving at knowledge in mathematics, science, and even religion. Hence, following the leads of Bacon, Spinoza, and Kant, I will distinguish between the dogmatists and the skeptics; since both camps, the Continentals and the British thinkers, are concerned with the roles of reason and experience (or experiment) in philosophical thought, I will take the dogmatism/skepticism distinction as a more fundamental one.

Recently, some critics of modernity have argued that the philosophical tradition wrongly has treated Descartes as the founder of early modern philosophy. Instead, they have suggested either Locke (Nicholas Wolterstorff) or Montaigne (Stephen Toulmin) as having made more radical breaks with the preceding medieval traditions. One moral theorist, Alasdair MacIntyre, has argued that 'the Enlightenment project', with its mistaken conception of morality as autonomy (which he takes to be a secularist morality independent of all religious moorings) is both incoherent and philosophically mistaken. I will argue, as have some others, that perhaps the Enlightenment thinkers got a great deal right, and that we will do well to read them charitably (as well as critically), and that dismissiveness of philosophical positions is intellectually shoddy workmanship. As a corrective to postmodernist misinterpretation, I would recommend J. B. Schneewind's *The Invention of Autonomy*, Charles Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Christine Korsgaard's *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, & Onora O'Neill's *Constructions of Reason*. We will spend the semester reading the Enlightenment thinkers themselves but keep in mind these postmodernist critics; then you as enlightened students will make your own informed decisions about these early modern philosophers.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. **Careful Reading:** Improved ability in reading for pivotal points or passages of texts; learning to detect ambiguities, ironic and metaphorical terms, core ideas and arguments of complex texts.
2. **Critical Reasoning:** Increased ability at analyzing and assessing arguments; uncovering hidden assumptions, faulty reasoning, logical organization of ideas and theories.
3. **Moral Reflection:** Increased recognition of diverse moral/political/religious assumptions, theories, and implications of early modern European thinkers.
4. **Historical Discernment:** Sensitivity to historical forces, changes influencing thinkers of the

Enlightenment; learning how Enlightened thinkers conceived of the past, in relation to them.

Schedule of Readings:

- January 15 -- Donne: 'And New Philosophy Calls All in Doubt' -- New Science of Nature: Copernicus' *Revolutionibus*, Kepler's *New Astronomy*, Galileo's *Two New Sciences*, Bacon's *New Organon* (AW vii-viii, 4-7)
- 17 -- Overthrowing Aristotle: Galileo's *Dialogues concerning the Two Chief World Systems*; Epicurus' Atomism Baptized -- Gassendi's *Paradoxes Against the Aristotelians*, Boyle on the Corpuscular Philosophy (AW, 262-9); Ancient Skepticism Revived -- Pyrrho & Pierre Bayle (AW 486-490)

For these first two readings, there is a very helpful website on the scientific background to early modern thought found at <http://galileo.rice.edu>. [This is known as 'The Galileo Project' -- very well-informed site put together by some prestigious historians of science.] Scroll down to **Science**, then down to **Theories**, then down to **Copernican system**.

- 22 -- Descartes: *Discourse on Method*, Pts. 1,2,5 (AW, 12-21); Dedication, Preface, Synopsis of *Meditations* (A&W, 22-27) [Also, see stanford.edu, then go to 'Descartes' Life and Works' for Pts. 3, 4, 6 of the *Discourse*.]
- 24 -- Descartes: *Meditation I, II* (AW 27-34); Hobbes' Obj. (AW 63-66)
- 29 -- *Meditation III* (AW 34-41); Hobbes', Arnauld's Obj. (AW 66-73)
- 31 -- *Meditation IV* (AW 41-5); Mersenne's Obj. (CSM 278-284)
- February 5 -- *Meditation V* (AW 45-8); Gassendi's Obj. (CSM 224-228)
- 7 -- *Meditation VI* (AW 48-55); Mersenne's Obj. (CSM 87-92)

[For an excellent outside source, go to <http://www.sitemaker.umich.edu/emcurley/descartes> for an online version of E. M. Curley's *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (1978; now out of print).]

- 12 -- Locke: *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. I, II, IV (AW 270-81; 341-6; 358-67)
- 14,19 -- *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Locke, ed. Shapiro 213-54)
- 21 -- Leibniz: *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Preface (AW 374-378); *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §§1-14, 19 (AW 184-192, 195-6)
- 26 -- *Letters to Clarke* (AW 249-58)
- 28 -- **Guest Lecturer: Dr. Sloane Despeaux on Newton-Leibniz Dispute on Calculus**
- March 3-7 -- **SPRING BREAK**
- 11 -- Hume: "Of Miracles"; "Immortality of Soul"; "Suicide" (H, 107-25; 91-105)
- 13 -- **No Class: Daryl at Duke Divinity School conference**
- 18 -- *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Pt. I-III (H, 3-27)
- 19-21 -- **Easter Break: No Class (Ironic, how it falls during our Hume readings?)**
- 25 -- *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Pt. IV-VII (H, 28-48)
- 27 -- *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Pt. VIII-X (H, 49-66)
- April 1 -- **NO CLASS: Advising Day**
- 3 -- *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Pt. XI-XII (H, 67-89)
- 8 -- Kant: "What is Enlightenment?"; "What is Orientation in Thinking?" (K, 3-14)
- 10 -- "Miscarriage of All Philosophical Experiments in Theodicy" (K, 17-30)
- 15 -- *Religion within the Boundaries of Sheer Reason*, Part One (45-73)
- 17 -- *Religion within the Boundaries of Sheer Reason*, Part Two (77-102)
- 22,24 -- *Religion within the Boundaries of Sheer Reason*, Part Three (105-147)
- 29 -- *Religion within the Boundaries of Sheer Reason*, Part Four (151-170)
- May 1 -- "The End of All Things" (195-205)
- Wed., May 7 -- **FINAL EXAM, 12:00-2:30**

Review terms (toleration, theodicy, atomism, monadism, realism, idealism, skepticism, solipsism, dualism, et al.); key Latin or German phrases (*cogito ergo sum*, *tabula rasa*, *Wissenschaft*, *scientia*, *Naturforschern*) and thinkers (Descartes & critics, Locke, Leibniz, Hume, Kant)

COURSE TEXTS:

Rental: Roger Ariew & Eric Watkins, *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*

Supplementary, Required Texts:

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) and *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689)

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779)

Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood, George di Giovanni (*Religion* pub. 1793); pay close attention to the excellent introduction by Robert M. Adams (vii-xxxii), and we will follow the chronological table on pp. xxxiii-xxxiv as a guide in seeing how Kant develops his philosophy of religion over time.

For the early part of the course, in order to assure common ground on the scientific background of early modern philosophy, I have listed a website called 'The Galileo Project': this should be extremely helpful in bringing your scientific knowledge of the period up to speed. There are a number of historical giants listed on this site - Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, etc. (if you've heard of Stephen Hawking's *On the Shoulders of Giants* book, these are the giants that Hawking recognizes as his intellectual mentors). Click on any of the categories, and you will be able to fill in any gaps in your knowledge of the history of early modern science.

The following books are helpful for understanding the general doctrines, theories, concepts and **Weltanschauung** of the Enlightenment thinkers:

The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards

The Philosopher's Index

The Cambridge (or, Oxford) Dictionary of Philosophy

James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment*

Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*

Pierre Duhem, *To Save the Phenomena*

Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment* (2 vols.)

Maurice Mandelbaum, *Philosophy, Science, and Sense Perception*

Andrea Nye, *The Princess and the Philosopher*

Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*;

-----, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*

Dava Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter*

Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*

Margaret Wilson, *Ideas and Mechanism*

John Yolton, ed., *Philosophy, Religion, and Science in the 17th and 18th Centuries*

There are also some famous period pieces that give valuable insights into the philosophical assumptions and arguments of the day:

- A. Descartes, *Objections and Replies* (available in several trans. :
 - i. Elizabeth Haldane & G.R.T. Ross
 - ii. John Cottingham *et al.* (most recent scholarly ed.)
- B. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*
- C. Pierre Bayle, *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*
- D. Antoine Arnauld & Pierre Nicole, *Logic or the Art of Thinking*
- E. Montaigne, *Essays* (esp. "Apology for Raimonde Sebonde")
- F. H. G. Alexander, ed., *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*
- G. Johannes Kepler, *A Defence of Tycho Against Ursus* (ed. Nicholas Jardine)
- H. Galileo Galilei, *Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences*;
 -----, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*
- I. Isaac Newton, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*
 -----, *Optics*

J. Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"

Also, there is a helpful website at **EpistemeLinks.com** . Once there, click on the 'Early Modern' historical period, and you should be able to find all of the major philosophers that we are reading.

Course Assignments:

1. Choose one of Descartes' *Meditations* and discuss one of the most powerful objections raised by one of Descartes' contemporaries. For example -- does Descartes' method of hyperbolic doubt truly enable him to attain a genuine **scientia** of nature? Be sure to relate your topic to the *Discourse on Method*. Discuss whether or not Descartes has a convincing reply to his critics on this point. Consider at least 2 articles by Descartes scholars, such as Bernard Williams, Margaret Wilson, John Cottingham, Daniel Garber, E. M. Curley, Roger Ariew, Harry Frankfurt, Stephen Gaukroger, Marjorie Grene. Due around February 7.

2. Analyze Locke's argument for religious toleration in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Outline Locke's argument (premises and conclusion). Is his argument convincing? What has been left out, if anything, of the Lockean position on toleration? According to Locke, how might one acknowledge the true beliefs of one's religion without resorting to force and war to convert non-believers? How might one, if it is possible, be tolerant of the intolerant? Be sure to include 2 of the contemporary philosophers' responses to Locke's position presented in the Ian Shapiro collection (our edition of Locke's *Two Treatises/Letter Concerning Toleration*). PAR majors must write 8 pages and connect the *Letter* to the *Second Treatise of Governments*. Due Feb. 28, before spring break.

3. Take one of Hume's positions in ethics or religion (on suicide or immortality of the soul or miracles or the design argument) and state his argument. Is Hume's skepticism reasonable or is he being an excessive skeptic? If Hume's skepticism is reasonable, what response might one give who is interested in defending the traditional moral or religious position under attack by Hume? Or, does Hume have a positive view of his own on religion that is intellectually engaging (consider his 'Natural History of Religion' in connection with this essay)? Or, can one, contrary to Hume's considered view, accept modern scientific naturalism and still find room for miracles in one's philosophical or theological position? Or, given that Hume's criticisms of the Design argument are correct, does this mean all he has left the theist is some sort of fideist position in religion? Due March 27 (thought I'd give you a chance to reflect on religious agnosticism over the Easter holiday).

4. In his *Religion within the Boundaries of Bare Reason*, Kant seems to suggest that religion and theology should be very limited in what they can say to philosophers. Given that Kant is worried about the invasive and destructive nature of political authorities on freedom of religious thought, he gives a strong defense of the individual's freedom to use their own reason (consider esp. the *Enlightenment* essay). In so doing, does Kant leave much (or, any) room for divine grace? Examine the introductory essay by Robert M. Adams and use that as a position from which to voice your own reflections on Kant's philosophy of religion. Another line of questioning: does Kant give us a constructive metaphysical position that does justice to human claims for moral freedom and yet acknowledges the fact that we live in a mechanistic universe? In responding to Humean skeptical worries, does Kant deny knowledge of the noumenal realm (God, freedom, immortality) to such an extent that he ends up providing a default argument for atheism or agnosticism? Due May 1.

5. Throughout the semester, I will ask you to turn in summaries of the reading for the day, or outlines of the argument of some portion of the book we are reading, or a set of questions drawn from the reading. Also, we will have a quiz on Descartes' *Meditations*, another on Locke and Leibniz, and a final one on Hume's *Dialogues*. For the final exam, I will draw from those quizzes for the objective portion of the final exam. The final will also include two essays on interpretation of one passage from Descartes (perhaps the ontological argument) and one passage from Kant (perhaps his critique of the ontological argument). Or I might use the Nicholas Wolterstorff article ("Tradition, Insight, and Constraint") to present the argument that Locke, rather than Descartes, should rightly be regarded as the true founder of modern philosophy, and then ask you to give your reasons for selecting either Descartes or Locke.