Questions for Review and Discussion (Week I)

GENERAL PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON DISCUSSION SECTIONS

A sheet of Questions for Review and Discussion will be handed out each week. The sheet will be divided into three parts: 1) terms to be identified, 2) review questions (which ask simple questions of fact) 3) discussion questions (which are open-ended, without simple or direct answers). Normally, the first two categories are designed for you to study on your own, rather than being covered in discussion section. They can usually be answered by referring to the reading (get used to using the indexes of the assigned books), or by reviewing your lecture notes. The third category is designed for the discussion sections, with the assumption that you have done the reading, attended lecture, and are thus prepared for discussion. Not much time in discussion section should be devoted to identifying terms or to answering simple questions of fact, especially those that you could yourself easily answer by consulting the text or your lecture notes. Similarly, discussion section is not designed primarily for simple review or drill—and certainly not to go over material in the reading and lectures for those students who have not done the reading or missed the lectures.

It is extremely important that you come prepared to discussion section. You may of course ask questions of any sort in discussion section. You will understandably forget things you have read or heard in lecture, and some time in discussion section will inevitably be devoted to clarification of simple matters of fact. But recognizing those points is not the same as excusing those who come completely unprepared for discussion and then want to be spoon-fed. Teaching assistants will take note of those who miss sections, lectures, or otherwise come ill-prepared; short quizzes to determine how carefully students have done the reading may be given. The teaching assistants have the option of adding or subtracting up to five points (on a scale of 100) in calculating final grades, to reflect whether a student has attended discussion section regularly, has arrived well prepared, and has participated actively. Thus, a cumulative score for midterm, book review, and final exam of 89 points (B+) might go as high as 94 (A); a cumulative score of 74 (C) could fall to 69 (D+), depending on whether five points are added or subtracted for section preparation and participation.

You will sometimes not completely understand everything discussed in section, and there will not always be time to answer all your questions or to cover all the discussion questions on these sheets. The office hours of both your teaching assistant and Professor Lindemann are designed to deal with the questions that remain. But again, remember that primary responsibility rests on your shoulders. To use office hours productively, you must give serious attention to the reading and lectures beforehand. Feel free as well to contact your teaching assistant via e-mail, especially for questions that are easily answered in brief, written form (but don't ask questions that can be easily answered by using the index of your textbooks).

RELEVANT LECTURES FOR FIRST WEEK OF DISCUSSION: lectures 2 (“State and Society in the Eighteenth Century”) and 3 (“The Enlightenment”).

RELEVANT READING FOR FIRST WEEK OF DISCUSSION: Perry, Chapter 3.

1. Identifications. You should be able to identify these terms, supply dates where appropriate, and discuss their historical significance. The terms provided in this sheet, or the questions below, by no means represent a systematic attempt to touch upon all the material in the reading and lectures; they rather
suggest the kinds of things you should be picking up. If you do not recognize them, it is an indication that you need to read and study more carefully. None of these are obscure terms or trick questions.

a. Spirit of the Laws  
b. parlements  
c. Thomas Hobbes  
d. Condorcet  
e. General Will  
f. John Locke  
g. philosophes  
h. The Age of Reason  
i. Frederick the Great  
j. philosophes

2. Review Questions. You should be able to supply short answers—usually a few sentences—to these questions, again, with dates where appropriate. Note that a few questions similar to these are provided in Perry concerning the documents that you are assigned to read there. You should study them and be prepared to answer them as well.

a. What was the purpose of the balance of power system in Europe? How well did the system work? What was England’s role in it?

b. What were the most characteristic concerns or ideals of the Enlightenment? Contrast them with the concerns and ideals of the middle ages.

c. The political, economic, and military developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries favored the formation of strong, centralized states on the European continent. Which state was most successful in forging an efficient absolutist structure? What were that state’s most important characteristics? Why did England develop along distinctly different lines?

de. What sort of man was Peter the Great? Why has he been called “great”? May we say that there was something “typically Russian” about him, or at least that his actions and personality were palpably the product of Russian conditions and history?

df. What were the principal differences in the political and social development of eastern and western Europe from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries?

g. The philosophes were inclined to deny biblical miracles or even the existence of a Judeo-Christian god. What were the foundations for those denials? In which ways did their ideas look back to or even copy those of classical times? What was the attitude of the philosophes to the middle ages?

3. Discussion Questions. To an important degree, these questions have no precise or clearly “correct” answers, since they often touch upon values and interpretations. They are designed to encourage you to think critically and independently about the lectures and the reading; they often ask you to put together things that are not explicitly put together for you in lectures and reading. These questions, or some altered form of them, will likely appear as essay questions in the midterm and final examinations.

a. Enlightened despotism has been described as an ideal political theory—if only it worked. What were its attractions to men like Voltaire? Why has it continued, in various forms, to attract people ever since? What are its flaws—why hasn’t it in fact ever worked? (Or has it?) Contrast the accomplishments of the enlightened despots with those of less despotic rulers. What was it that enlightened despots wanted most of all?

b. The philosophes have been described as men who esteemed reason and nature. Is this description entirely justified? What did they mean by “reason” and “nature”? Might it be said that they relied upon their own kind of “faith”?
c. The idea of the “right to revolution” is often described as having its roots in the Enlightenment. That idea has even been termed an obvious product of the historical conditions peculiar to the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What is meant by these assertions? Do human beings indeed have a right to revolution, and if so, what is the source of that right (e.g., is it god-given, or “self-evident”)? In a related way, what is the ultimate source of political authority? (from God? tradition? the people?) In which ways are the American Constitution and the constitution composed by the French in 1791 transparently products of the Enlightenment?

d. Immanuel Kant, in the selections in Perry [pp. 55-6], discusses the temptations of remaining “immature,” of letting others do our thinking for us. He urges his contemporaries to stop being “lazy,” to have the courage to “grow up,” to be brave enough actually to “want to know the truth” (sapere aude), to face it, even if it is unpleasant—to become, in short, intellectual and moral adults, rather than children hungering after fairy tales (traditional religion). Are most people in practice capable of the kind of “adulthood” that Kant urges? Will not the “fear of freedom,” or the urge to “escape” from it, always be with us? Kant believed more freedom would solve the problems of his day—does freedom consistently have the beneficial effects that he and other eighteenth-century thinkers seemed to assume? Is Kant’s appeal in fact to our sense of reason or is it to our sense of morality (which is itself “a-rational” or beyond reason, just as religious belief is in other regards)? Is Kant finally being fair to those who are religious?

e. In Perry, p. 61-64, Voltaire makes an appeal for toleration, religious most of all, but also in more far-reaching ways (“let us mutually pardon our follies. This is the last law of nature”). How can one define toleration and what are its limits? The issue is much less simple than might first appear to be the case: One cannot “tolerate” child abuse or torture of political prisoners, for example, and thus morality is based on not tolerating certain acts that are defined as immoral. How does one make a viable distinction between moral “intolerance” and “bigotry” (that is, intolerance of differences between people)?