



The University of Western Ontario

*DRAFT*

*HISTORY 3404G*

**Montesquieu to Mill: Classic Texts and Debates in Western Culture**

*Fall/Winter 2018-19*

*Tuesdays, 11:30-1:30, STVH 1155*

**Instructor: Eli Nathans**

Office Hours: TBA

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**Course Description:**

The class examines and compares the work of key Enlightenment thinkers, including Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau, as well as later authors who responded to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and interpreted contemporary changes taking place in Europe, including Edmund Burke, Friedrich Hegel, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill.

***Prerequisite(s):***

1.0 History course at the 2200 level or above.

**Course Syllabus:**

This course is about a multi-generational conversation. The conversation began, or at least assumed new forms, in the first half of the eighteenth century, in part in response to the military, political, and commercial successes of Great Britain, whose government and society came to serve as a counter-model to the monarchical absolutism characteristic of continental Europe; in part as a result of the expansion of European commerce and contact with foreign lands and cultures, which created new forms of wealth and expanded the imagination about the forms taken by states and societies; in part because of the weakening of the power of purely religious templates for human affairs; in part as a consequence of the example of scientific progress, most notably connected with the name of Isaac Newton; and for numerous other reasons as well. This conversation assumed that humans, or at least some humans, had the power to make choices about the form and direction of societies and governments. The writers on this subject usually responded to ideas and claims of other writers, in a complex process of inspiration, dismissal, and reworking. These connections are what makes their writings a conversation.

It is necessary in a history class to find a beginning, and this class will begin in 1748, when a French nobleman, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, inspired in part by Isaac Newton's discovery of laws of attraction that explained the movements of the planets, undertook to explain the laws that moved human beings and societies. It was absurd to think, Montesquieu wrote in the first lines of *Of the Spirit of the Laws*, that "une fatalite aveugle a produits tous les effets que nous

voyons dans le monde” (“that a blind fatalism produced all the effects that we see in the world”). Montesquieu concluded that different forms of government institutions resulted from distinctive social and cultural conditions, the distinctive forms of feeling and patterns of behavior to which people had become habituated, as well as of climate and geography. The treatise he produced attempted to explain how distinctive patterns of feeling and behavior animated different political institutions.

Montesquieu’s treatise became one of the most influential works of political theory of the eighteenth century. The conversations it inspired have continued to the present day. We will discuss two very recent and very interesting examinations of Montesquieu’s argument.

We then examine, more briefly, two of Montesquieu’s contemporary critics, Voltaire and Rousseau. While Montesquieu was – in the French context – a defender of the power of the aristocracy and also, in a more limited way, of religion, with an emphasis more on its political function than on the content of its teaching, Voltaire was a scathing critic of both aristocracy and Christianity. Voltaire was more inclined than Montesquieu to judge societies based primarily on elite cultural achievements, especially the literary and scientific.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an outlier among the philosophes of eighteenth century France, rebelled against hierarchies of the kind that both Montesquieu and Voltaire considered natural and desirable. Rousseau argued that to achieve even a modicum of happiness required a return to a simpler and more egalitarian existence. Both the work of Karl Marx and Michel Foucault can be read as variations on the critique of modern society found in Rousseau.

The next stops on this intellectual journey are Adam Smith and Edmund Burke. Smith is most famous as an opponent of the mercantilist policies of eighteenth-century states, which he believed led to the stifling of economic expansion. Smith had read Rousseau, and in fact shared many of his concerns about the evil effects of modern economic practices on the individual. The class will examine both Smith’s economic recommendations and how he proposed that modern societies might mitigate the evils associated with free markets and specialization.

Edmund Burke, a member of the British House of Commons for nearly thirty years, is best known for the defense of the political constitution of Britain found in his critique of the French Revolution, an extended essay published in 1790. Burke’s essay can be read as a variation on the arguments of Montesquieu, since he also stressed the ways in which the tripartite division of power in Britain, between the different parts of the British parliament, the monarch, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons, and the tensions between the parts, preserved the liberties of citizens and the stability of the larger structure. Furthermore, Burke’s uneasiness with declarations of universal principles of individual rights echoed Montesquieu’s emphasis on the need to examine the circumstances of each society before judging the character of the political regime proper to it. While Montesquieu was especially interested in defending the powers of the aristocracy against the encroachments of the French monarchy, Burke defended the power of the monarchy and, with much greater fervor than Montesquieu, the established church, against the secular republicanism of the French Revolution.

The course next examines selections from Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*, both of which, in different ways, focus

on the treatment of women in European societies. Wollstonecraft was both inspired by Rousseau's radical critique of modern society, which she adapted to the situation of women, and at the same time repelled by his chauvinism, for he reproduced in his treatment of gender the hierarchy he otherwise criticized. Wollstonecraft was deeply critical of Burke's conservatism. Wollstonecraft is considered a "founding figure in modern Anglo-American feminism," though she "was rarely even mentioned, let alone venerated, for most of the nineteenth century." Her influence was "powerful, haunting, and suggestive," but subterranean.<sup>1</sup> Women writers more commonly wrote novels than philosophical treatises; among other reasons, they usually did not have access to university libraries, or the leisure or space required by the treatise. *Aurora Leigh* (1856), a novel in the form of a poem, was in part a critique of the subordinate and often degraded conditions into which society – and especially men – pressed women. *Aurora Leigh* is one of many examples of a fictional work by a woman that calls into question aspects of the contemporary gender order.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel attempted an ambitious and influential interpretation of the parallel ways in which both individuals (*Phenomenology of Mind (or Spirit)*(1806)) and societies (*Philosophy of Right* (1821)) should fulfill their highest potential. Hegel postulated that both as individuals and societies humans began in a condition characterized by egoism, with a focus on the material, and by passing through a series of what one might call developmental stages might reach conditions that were more free, dignified, and creative.

While Hegel focused on human history as a psychological and philosophical voyage, with a clear endpoint, Alexis de Tocqueville sought to explain the choices confronting Europe, and especially France, as a result of what he considered an inevitable tendency towards democratization. Tocqueville feared that democratic conditions would lead to materialism, social isolation, and tyranny of the majority. His famous study of the United States, published in 1835 and 1840, examined whether the Americans had developed democratic institutions, practices, and forms of feeling that might hinder these negative features of democratic regimes.

Tocqueville analyzed the United States as a model of democratic conditions and devoted relatively little space to the institution of slavery, which then dominated the economy of the American South. The realities of this brutal crime are not an especially significant part of the conversation on which the class has heretofore focused. We examine the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, first published in 1845, and in a revised form in 1881. Douglass' principal goal was to acquaint contemporary society, especially those parts not in direct contact with the institution of slavery, with the brutality of slavery and the extent to which slavery degraded the society that sanctioned it, even those whose contact with its institutions was slight.

This intellectual voyage will end with a discussion of John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty*, published in 1859. Mill had carefully read Tocqueville's study of the democracy in the United States, and was most disturbed by what Tocqueville had characterized as a tendency towards intellectual conformity. Mill's essay examines the extent to which, and the grounds on which, societies might legitimately limit freedom of expression, individual actions, and also actions by groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6-7.

**Course Materials (incomplete):**

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford World's Classics: 2009)

Keegan Callanan, *Montesquieu's Liberalism and the Problem of Universal Politics* (Cambridge: 2018).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Oxford World's Classics: 2009).

The books required for the course may be purchased at the Western bookstore. Other materials will be posted on in the Resources section of the course OWL website.

**Methods of Evaluation:**

Participation in seminar discussions, as well as periodic response papers on the assigned readings:  
30%

Two essays, each approximately eight to ten pages in length, on the assigned readings, based on questions set by the instructor. Students will have a choice of topics.  
70% (each essay is worth 35% of the class grade)

**There is no mid-term or final examination in this class.**

**Course Schedule and Readings (may be adjusted as semester proceeds):**

January 7 Introduction

Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*: notice of the author; preface; book one; book two, chapters 1,2,4,5; book three.

Keegan Callanan, *Montesquieu's Liberalism and the Problem of Universal Politic* (Cambridge University Press: 2018), 1-62.

Annelien de Dijn, *French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville. Liberty in a Levelled Society* (Cambridge University Press, 20-32.

Annelien de Dijn, "Was Montesquieu a Liberal Republican?," *Review of Politics* 76 (2014): 21-41.

January 14

Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*: book eleven, chapter six; book nineteen.

Keegan Callanan, *Montesquieu's Liberalism and the Problem of Universal Politics*, 102-271.

January 21

Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*

J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, selections.

January 28

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*,

Paul Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift. Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville & The Modern Prospect* (New Haven: Yale, 2009), 75-95.

February 4

Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, selections.

Jerry Z. Muller, *The Mind and the Market. Capitalism in Modern European Thought* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 51-83.

February 11

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 3-117.

Week of February 10<sup>th</sup>: Spring Reading Week

February 25

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, selections.

Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 1-52.

March 3

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, selections.

Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 53-130.

March 10

G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, selections.

G.W.F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, selections

March 17

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1 (Colonial Press, 1900), 3-16, 191-199, 258-273; Vol. 2, 36-41, 99-159, 202-27.

Annelien de Dijn, *French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville. Liberty in a Levelled Society* (Cambridge University Press. 129-54.

Francois Furet, "The Intellectual Origins of Tocqueville's Thought," *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville* 7 (1985/86): 117-29.

March 24

Frederick Douglas, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglas* (Citadel, 1983), selections.

March 31

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*.

April 7

Open

### **Additional Statements**

#### ***Academic Offences:***

Scholastic Offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitute a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com ( <http://www.turnitin.com> ).

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review

by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

### ***Accessibility Options:***

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website: [www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated\\_exams.html](http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html)

### ***Medical Issues***

The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet his/her academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Please go to:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_illness.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf)

to read about the University's policy on medical accommodation. In the event of illness, you should contact Academic Counselling as soon as possible. The Academic Counsellors will determine, in consultation with the student, whether or not accommodation should be requested. They will subsequently contact the instructors in the relevant courses about the accommodation. Once the instructor has made a decision about whether to grant an accommodation, the student should contact his/her instructors to determine a new due date for tests, assignments, and exams.

Students must see the Academic Counsellor and submit all required documentation in order to be approved for certain accommodation.

Please note: Please visit [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic\\_policies/index.html](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/index.html) to view all updated academic policies regarding medical accommodations.

### ***Plagiarism:***

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Students are expected to retain all research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, your instructor may ask you to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

The following rules pertain to the acknowledgements necessary in academic papers.

A. In using another writer's words, you must both place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge that the words are those of another writer.

You are plagiarizing if you use a sequence of words, a sentence or a paragraph taken from other writers without acknowledging them to be theirs. Acknowledgement is indicated either by (1) mentioning the author and work from which the words are borrowed in the text of your paper; or

by (2) placing a footnote number at the end of the quotation in your text, and including a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or in a separate reference section at the end of your essay). This footnote should indicate author, title of the work, place and date of Publication and page number. Method (2) given above is usually preferable for academic essays because it provides the reader with more information about your sources and leaves your text uncluttered with parenthetical and tangential references. In either case words taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks or set off from your text by single spacing and indentation in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for your own words. Note that you cannot avoid indicating quotation simply by changing a word or phrase in a sentence or paragraph which is not your own.

B. In adopting other writer's ideas, you must acknowledge that they are theirs.

You are plagiarizing if you adopt, summarize, or paraphrase other writers' trains of argument, ideas or sequences of ideas without acknowledging their authorship according to the method of acknowledgement given in 'A' above. Since the words are your own, they need not be enclosed in quotation marks. Be certain, however, that the words you use are entirely your own; where you must use words or phrases from your source; these should be enclosed in quotation marks, as in 'A' above.

Clearly, it is possible for you to formulate arguments or ideas independently of another writer who has expounded the same ideas, and whom you have not read. Where you got your ideas is the important consideration here. Do not be afraid to present an argument or idea without acknowledgement to another writer, if you have arrived at it entirely independently.

Acknowledge it if you have derived it from a source outside your own thinking on the subject. In short, use of acknowledgements and, when necessary, quotation marks is necessary to distinguish clearly between what is yours and what is not. Since the rules have been explained to you, if you fail to make this distinction, your instructor very likely will do so for you, and they will be forced to regard your omission as intentional literary theft. Plagiarism is a serious offence which may result in a student's receiving an 'F' in a course or, in extreme cases, in their suspension from the University.

### ***Scholastic Offences***

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:

[www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### ***Copyright***

Lectures and course materials, including power point presentations, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by copyright. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own educational use. You may not record lectures, reproduce (or allow others to reproduce), post or distribute lecture notes, wiki material, and other course materials publicly and/or for commercial purposes without my written consent.

### ***Support Services***

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western, [http://uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.



*Use of Electronic Devices*

Electronic devices may not be used when writing response papers.

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

If you have any further questions or concerns please contact, Heidi Van Galen, Administrative Officer, Department of History, 519-661-2111 x84963 or e-mail [vangalen@uwo.ca](mailto:vangalen@uwo.ca).