

History 3404F
Montesquieu to Mill: Classic Texts and Debates in Western Culture
Winter 2025

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This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Course Description:

The class examines and compares the work of influential 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. We compare the critiques of European societies' treatment of women found in iconic works by Mary Wollstonecraft and, although it breaks the temporal bounds of the course, Virginia Woolf. We also read the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, a critique of the system of colonial slavery that European societies created and from which they profited.

Prerequisite(s): 1.0 History course at the 2200-level or above.

Course Syllabus:

We examine a multi-generational conversation. The conversation began, or at least assumed new forms, in the first half of the eighteenth century. In part it was prompted by 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. The conversation was also a product of the development of European trade with much of the world, which, while it led to conquest, exploitation, and enslavement on a vast scale, also expanded the imagination regarding the forms that could be taken by states and societies. The religious wars and doctrinal debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, between the Catholic Church and its supporters and a range of Protestant sects and states, led some to question all Christian teachings. Scientific discoveries, especially those of Isaac Newton, inspired some Europeans to search for the rules that explained human societies. 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, rejection, and reworking of ideas. These connections are what makes their writings a conversation.

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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 gravity 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 fatalité 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 political institutions were a product of, and also reinforced, distinctive social and cultural conditions, the distinctive forms of feeling and patterns of behavior to which people had become habituated. They also reflected distinctive climates and geographic conditions, which influenced economic practices and relationships. The treatise he produced proposed a range of categories, ideal types, that enabled him to analyze the various forms taken by political institutions and social practices, and the relationship between the two.

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 interpretations 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 on its political function as well as 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. The work of both Karl Marx and Michel Foucault can be read as variations on the critique of modern society found in Rousseau.

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 – like Montesquieu - he stressed the ways in which the tripartite division of power in Britain, between the monarch, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons, and the tensions between these 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). 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.¹

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 by passing through a series of what one might call developmental stages both individuals and societies have the potential to achieve conditions that are free, dignified, and creative. We examine the section of his work that attempts an explanation of the role of the state in his conception of human history.

While Hegel interpreted human history as a psychological and philosophical voyage that achieved its culmination in an authoritarian state that bore some resemblance to late eighteenth century Prussia, Alexis de Tocqueville sought to explain the choices confronting Europe, and especially France, as a result of what he considered an inevitable historical evolution in the direction of social and political democracy. Tocqueville feared that democratic conditions would lead to materialism, social isolation, and the political and intellectual tyranny of the majority. His famous study of the United States, published in two volumes in 1835 and 1840, examined whether the Americans had developed democratic institutions, practices, and forms of feeling that might hinder these negative features of all democratic regimes. In many respects, as we will explore, Tocqueville's categories of analysis reflect the influence of Montesquieu. His study of the United States is in part an extended conversation with Montesquieu.

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 read the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, the child of enslaved Africans who grew up in Maryland in the United States, and managed to escape from enslavement at the age twenty-one. Douglass' principal goal was to acquaint white readers in the United States, especially those living in parts of the country where slavery had been banned, with the brutality of institution and the necessary degradation and criminality of the society that sanctioned it. His *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, first published in 1845, became one of the most influential pieces of abolitionist literature in the period before the American Civil War.

John Stuart Mill carefully read Tocqueville's study of democracy in the United States, and was most disturbed by what Tocqueville had characterized as a tendency towards

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

intellectual conformity. Mill's essay *On Liberty*, published in 1859, is a plea for permitting the greatest possible freedom for individual thought, speech, and action. While the essay outlines in a comprehensive way the dangers that arise from the restrictions on individual freedom that Mill opposes, Mill struggles to define what limitations societies might legitimately place on individual freedoms.

The final text the class will examine is Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, first published in 1929. Woolf's essay is a meditation on the various ways the second class status of women continued to hinder women's efforts to think and create freely, even after the achievement of formal legal equality with men. Our discussion will focus especially on the ways in which Woolf's essay further develops and also departs from the points of view expressed in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Methods of Evaluation

Participation in seminar discussions, as well as response papers on the assigned readings that will be written in most classes:

30%

Two essays, each approximately eight to ten pages (2500-3000 words) 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.

Participation in seminar discussions, as well as in-class response papers on many assigned readings:

Because I believe that it will promote the quality of class discussions, because some students are more reluctant than others to participate in these discussions, and because I want to be able to provide at least some credit to students who have carefully done the reading for a class but are unable to demonstrate this because of the size of the class limits the amount of time each student may speak, in most classes I will ask the class to respond in writing to questions about the reading that I will pose during the class. I plan to distribute only one response paper in each class, but it is conceivable that I would distribute two. I will ask students to write a response to the question posed on the page of paper I will distribute (or, if the class is conducted via Zoom, to upload responses to questions to the Assignments section of the course OWL website). Students will usually have ten minutes for this exercise; if the question is complex, it might be a bit longer. The exercise is open book and open notes; students may consult any assigned course materials and any notes that they have prepared before class. I will post the grades on the response papers in the course OWL Brightspace website gradebook.

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The response papers will determine part of the participation grade for the class. They will not count for more than half of the participation grade; the exact weight I assign will depend on the number of response papers distributed during the semester. I expect, however, to distribute these papers in most classes, and to assign them a weight of between a third and a half of the participation grade. Therefore, students still must participate regularly in class discussions to do well in the participation portion of the class.

I do not inform students before class of the question on the response papers. Part of the purpose of the response paper is to test student preparation of all of the assigned reading. Response paper questions will usually be drawn, in whole or in part, from the questions found in the syllabus.

In determining the grade for class participation for the semester I will not count the lowest grade received on one response paper and for participation in discussion in one session of the class. This provides an unbureaucratic way of handling family emergencies, illnesses, and other challenges that may arise during the semester and prevent class attendance or careful preparation for a class.

My grading of class participation will reflect quality rather than quantity of participation, but I will never penalize a comment that I consider an error. Sometimes the meaning of an author is hard to decipher, and I am very appreciative when students attempt an explanation even if they are not entirely certain.

Essays:

Students should write one essay in response to one question from the list of questions under “First Essay” and one essay in response to one question from the list of questions under “Second Essay.” Each essay should be 8-10 pages in length, roughly 2500 to 3000 words. The word count is a rough target. The instructor will read the entirety of any essay submitted. The essays should be based on all of the primary and secondary works assigned with respect to each author. Standard footnote form should be used (please see the *Guide to Researching and Writing a History Essay* in the Resources section of the course website for a summary of the rules, and also some advice on constructing paragraphs). Students may, if they wish, undertake additional research, but each question may be adequately answered based only on the assignments for the class.

Each essay is due shortly before the discussion of the texts on which it is based, or, if the essay is a comparison, before the discussion of the second of the two texts. Essays are not accepted after the class discussion to which they are keyed takes place. Students will have to select a different subject for the alternative essay. If the deadlines for both essay questions under the heading “First Essay” are missed, a ten point penalty will be assigned with respect to the make-up essay topic. Thus, a student who fails to write on one of the two questions assigned for the first essay cannot make up this failure by writing on both of the questions given for the second essay. One of the essays must focus on the material assigned in the first half of the class, and one on the material assigned in the second half. In the event of a failure to write an essay based on one of the two questions given under “First Essay,” the instructor will set an alternative

essay question that focuses on one or more of the authors studied in the first half of the class, and will impose a ten point penalty. The penalty will not be imposed if an accommodation request is received from an Academic Counseling Office with respect to the essay that was not submitted. However, the student will still have to write on an alternative question set by the instructor. Essays submitted after the deadline given for each essay (in all instances essays are due on the afternoon at 5:00 with respect to the class that will take place on the following day) but before the class will be penalized one point. Essays on the set question linked to a class will not be accepted after the start of class. Students who miss this deadline should contact the instructor to arrange an alternative subject. **Please note that all make-up essays must be submitted by April 4th. No extensions beyond this date are permitted without a accommodation request from an Academic Counseling Office.**

First essay:

Please select one of the following two questions:

1. What aspects of Burke's political philosophy, as expressed in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, parallel the arguments made in Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, and in what respects does Burke differ from Montesquieu? Essays should draw on the entirety of readings assigned with respect to both authors, including both the primary and the secondary sources. You may wish to consider: 1) which political institutions each writer fears most, and why; 2) the connections each draws between social forms and political institutions; 3) how each believes that change in political institutions should take place; and 4) the role religion plays in their political theories.

This essay should be uploaded to the Assignments section of the course OWL Brightspace website by Monday afternoon, February 3rd, at 5:00. If for some reason you are unable to upload the essay to the course Brightspace website, please send it as an attachment in Word to enathans@uwo.ca. I will promptly acknowledge receipt.

2. In what respects was Tocqueville's interpretation of American government and society in *Democracy in America* arguably influenced by Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*? Consider both the substance of Tocqueville's argument and his method, the issues on which he focuses and the questions he asks, as well as the conclusions he reaches. Essays should draw on the entirety of the reading assigned with respect to both authors, including both the primary and the secondary sources.

This essay should be uploaded to the Assignments section of the course OWL Brightspace website by Monday afternoon, February 10th, at 5:00. If for some reason you are unable to upload the essay to the course OWL Brightspace website, please send it as an attachment in Word to enathans@uwo.ca. I will promptly acknowledge receipt.

Second Essay:

Please select one of the following two questions:

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1. Mill writes in *On Liberty* that “the object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.” Mill, *On Liberty and The Subjection of Women* (Penguin Classics, 2006), 15-16. What are the principal weaknesses of Mill’s argument? You may wish to consider the objectives he hopes to achieve, the historical examples on which he relies, and the difficulty he has in defining the exact meaning and limits of a range of key claims, such as what conduct can be considered as harming others.

This essay should be uploaded to the Assignments section of the course OWL Brightspace website by Monday afternoon, March 24th, at 5:00. If for some reason you are unable to upload the essay to the course OWL Brightspace website, please send it as an attachment in Word to enathans@uwo.ca. I will promptly acknowledge receipt.

2. To what extent are the arguments and claims of Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* similar to those found in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and to what extent are her arguments and claims different, or perhaps even contrary, to those of Wollstonecraft? Please consider – although you need not limit your argument to these points - the claims each author makes about: the forms taken by women’s dependence on, and subordination to, men; the effects of this subordination and dependence on women, and on men; the means each proposes to end this subordination; and the ultimate goals each has for women.

This essay should be uploaded to the Assignments section of the course OWL Brightspace website by Monday afternoon, March 31st, at 5:00 am. If for some reason you are unable to upload the essay to the course OWL Brightspace website, please send it as an attachment in Word to enathans@uwo.ca. I will promptly acknowledge receipt.

Absences and Late Assignments:

As noted above, the lowest class participation grade and the lowest response paper grade will not be considered in calculating the participation grade for the term. This means that each student may miss one class, and one response paper, without having to request an accommodation. Further absences or missed response papers will not be excused without an accommodation request from the student’s Academic Counseling Office or consent of the instructor.

As noted above, essays are not accepted after the start of the class in which the relevant reading is discussed. Make-up essays are penalized ten points, and are due no later than 5:00 pm on Wednesday, April 2nd. Make-up essays submitted after Wednesday, April 2nd will be penalized one point per day the submission is late, with the first one point penalty imposed at 5:01pm on Wednesday, the second point at 5:01 pm on Thursday, April 3rd, and the third point at 5:01 pm

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on Friday, April 4th. **No essay may be submitted after 11:59 pm on Friday, April 4th without a request for an accommodation from the student's Academic Counseling Office.**

Course Materials

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).

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Norton, 2017).

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and the Subjection of Women* (Penguin Classics:2007).

Jerry Muller, *The Mind and the Market. Capitalism in Western Thought* (Anchor: 2003).

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

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*.

The books required for the course may be purchased at the Western bookstore, or on-line. Other materials will be posted in the Resources section of the course OWL Brightspace website; these materials are starred in the syllabus. The starred documents may also be purchased in the form of a coursepack available at the Western bookstore. In addition, the instructor will provide students with copies of Jerry Muller's *The Mind and the Market. Capitalism in Western Thought* (Anchor Books, 2002), from which several chapters are assigned.

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

Week One

*Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*: Author's Forward; Preface; Book one; Book two, chapters 1,3,4,5, Book three. Book four, Book five, chapters 1-4, 8-11, 14. (pp. xli-xlv, 3-9, 10-11, 16-43. 59-60, 62-63)

Keegan Callanan, *Montesquieu's Liberalism and the Problem of Universal Politics* (Cambridge University Press: 2018), 1-30.

Author's Forward (xli): Why is political virtue different from moral or religious virtue, and why is this difference significant? Does this description suggest that there is something like virtue in a monarchy? What does Montesquieu mean by the term "spring," (in French, "ressort")?

Preface (xliii-xlv): What claims does Montesquieu make for his book in the preface? What benefits will arise for humanity from reading this book? What kinds of prejudices does Montesquieu wish to attack? Why might Montesquieu have compared his work to that of a great painter (Corragio) and not to that of Newton? (xlv)

Book one, Chapter one: What role, if any, does Montesquieu assign to God in the world he describes? Why does M believe in natural law; what does he mean by it? How does Montesquieu characterize the condition of humans?

Book one, Chapter two: What are human beings like before society comes into existence, and how does Montesquieu differ in his interpretation from the author whom he quotes at some length, Hobbes?

Book one, Chapter three: Why is paternal government not the model of all government, according to Montesquieu? On what grounds does he claim that “laws should be so appropriate to the people for whom they are made that it is very unlikely that the laws of one nation can suit another”? (p. 8) How might the factors listed at the top of page 9 affect the laws adopted by each nation?

Book two, Chapters one, three, four, and five: What laws does Montesquieu consider proper for each of the forms of government he discusses, and why? What does Montesquieu mean by the claim that “the more an aristocracy approaches a democracy, the more perfect it will be, and to the degree it approaches a monarchy the less perfect it will become”? (p. 17) What role does the aristocracy play in the form of government Montesquieu calls monarchy? Why is the power of the clergy dangerous in a republic but valuable in a monarchy, according to Montesquieu? How does Montesquieu describe the condition of the despot? (p. 20)

Book three: Why is political virtue (patriotism) so necessary in a democratic republic? What threatens this virtue? Why are aristocratic republics moderate? (p. 25) Why, by inference, are democratic republics not moderate? Why is political virtue so rare in monarchies? Why are courts of monarchs almost always so corrupt? Why is there no need for political virtue in monarchies? How does the pursuit of honor operate to keep monarchies moderate? Why might monarchies be moderate? (p. 30) Why can neither political virtue nor honor be tolerated in a despotism?

Book four: What are the distinctive characteristics of education in a monarchy? How can one explain them? How does the story of the Vicomte of Orte, at page 33, illustrate the role Montesquieu believes the nobility should play in a monarchy? What are the goals of education in despotisms and in republics? Why might Montesquieu have rearranged the order in which he discussed the different regimes in this chapter, in comparison with the previous chapter? Why does Montesquieu discuss the ways in which Greek city states attempted to inculcate patriotism in their citizens at the end of this chapter? What conclusions might he wish to suggest? Why are republics only possible in very small cities, and silver must be banished from them? (p. 38) What role did music play in these states, according to Montesquieu?

Book five: Why does Montesquieu compare the citizens of democratic republican regimes to monks? (p. 43) What are the distinctive features of an aristocratic republic? (pp. 51-55) What makes a monarchy as he describes it excellent, according to Montesquieu? On what grounds does Montesquieu condemn despotism? (pp. 59-63) Why does a despotic government “leap to view”? Why is everyone “good enough” for despotism? (p. 63)

Week Two

*Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*: Book 11, chapters 1-6 (pp. 154-166)

Keegan Callanan, *Montesquieu’s Liberalism and the Problem of Universal Politics* (Cambridge University Press: 2018), 102-74.

Book eleven. Why does Montesquieu insist that “political liberty in no way consists of doing what one wants. In a state . . . liberty can consist only in having the power to do what one should want to do and in no way being constrained to do what one should not want to do”? What is the meaning of Montesquieu’s claims that “democracy and aristocracy are not free states by their nature” and that “political liberty is found only in moderate governments”? (p. 155) Chapter six of book eleven is Montesquieu’s description of the government of Britain, among the most famous sections of his work. The larger question raised by this chapter is: On what grounds does Montesquieu praise the constitution of Britain? What does Montesquieu’s definition of liberty on page 157 add to the definitions earlier in the chapter? Why, according to Montesquieu, is there no political liberty in the republic of Venice? (pp. 157-8) To what extent are the same individuals or bodies permitted to share one of the three types of political power, and to what extent must these powers be distributed among different bodies, to preserve political liberty as Montesquieu has defined it? What are the advantages of jury trials? (p. 158) On what grounds does Montesquieu defend the existence of the House of Lords? (p. 160) At the end of this chapter there are a series of cautionary statements. Why does Montesquieu call into question whether the English actually “enjoy this liberty or not”? Why does Montesquieu then describe the degree of political liberty enjoyed by the people of Britain as “extreme,” something he contrasts with people who enjoy only a moderate form of political liberty? (p. 166) Why does he then suggest that “men almost always accommodate themselves better to middles than to extremities”? What purpose is served, in this argument, by the reference to Harrington’s *Oceana*?

On what basis does Callanan argue that Montesquieu does not emphasize universal foundations for political institutions, unlike thinkers like Hobbes and Locke, who deduced from a supposedly universal human condition before the creation of the state what the proper form states should assume in all times and places? What aspects of human nature does Montesquieu consider universal, although this does not lead him to promote the legitimacy of only one form of government? What makes a government moderate, and what governments are by their nature immoderate?

How do different regimes mold the natures of their citizens? In what respects do the forms taken by family life, and the condition of women, reflect and prepare members of a particular society for the political regime of the society? What does Callanan suggest might be learned from Montesquieu's discussion of the effects of climate? What is the logic of the argument? How does commerce create an incentive for moderation?

Week Three

*Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Book nineteen, chapters 1-9, twenty-seven (pp. 308-313, 325-333)

Keegan Callanan, *Montesquieu's Liberalism and the Problem of Universal Politics*, 175-258.

*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.

*Peter Gay, *Voltaire's Politics. The Poet as Realist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988; first edition, 1959), 273-308.

*Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great. Selected Correspondence* (Cambridge: Oriental Research Partners, 1974), 4-32.

Jerry Muller, *The Mind and the Market. Capitalism in Western Thought* (Voltaire: "A Merchant of a Noble Kind"), 20-50.

Montesquieu:

Why does de Dijn believe that Montesquieu in fact considered the French version of monarchy – with some improvements – a more desirable form of government than the aristocratic form of republicanism found in Britain? Whose argument do you find more convincing, that of de Dijn or of Callanan?

Voltaire:

What aspects of the Calas, Sirven, and La Barre cases so enraged Voltaire? How did he go about challenging the results of those cases? How did he propose to reform the French criminal law system?

According to Lentin's introduction, how did Catherine succeed in using Voltaire for her own propagandistic purposes? What failings or shortcomings of Voltaire are revealed by this sad episode near the end of his life?

1. What aspects of the Calas, Sirven, and La Barre cases so enraged Voltaire? How did he go about challenging the results of those cases? How did he propose to reform the French criminal law system? According to Lentin's introduction, how did Catherine

succeed in using Voltaire for her own propagandistic purposes? What failings or shortcomings of Voltaire are revealed by this sad episode near the end of his life?

2. Like Montesquieu, Voltaire praised the market and commerce. In what respects can one find similarities to the arguments found in Montesquieu, and what differences are there between the role of commerce in the arguments of the two thinkers? What similarities and differences are there in each author's attitude towards religion?

Week Four

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Oxford World's Classics), 3-127.

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

In reading Rousseau, please consider the following questions:

1. Why are humans in the state of nature, as Rousseau imagines it, both relatively equal to each other and also, for the most part, happy or at least content?
2. What reasons bring about the creation of society? Why do some people in society feel the need to form a government, according to Rousseau? Given the reasons why and the manner in which human governments were created, should members of society feel any need to treat governments as legitimate, according to Rousseau?
3. What are the most important characteristics of human society, as Rousseau describes them? Why are human beings, or at least the vast majority of human beings, unhappy in society?
4. How does Rousseau characterize the nature of commerce?
5. Does Rousseau's depiction suggest any constructive response to the dilemma in which humans have placed themselves?
6. What does Rousseau owe to Montesquieu, whose *Spirit of the Laws* he carefully read (Rousseau's lengthy notes have been preserved).

Week Five

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford World's Classics), 3-117.

Jerry Muller, *The Mind and the Market. Capitalism in Western Thought* (Edmund Burke: Commerce, Conservatism, and the Intellectuals), 104-138.

How does Burke defend the institution of monarchy? Why does he term the "hereditary principle of succession in our government" sacred (although he is also quick to note that the society also retained "a power of change in its application in cases of extreme emergency")? (p. 21) On what grounds does Burke deny that he believes in monarchy by divine right? Why does he object so strongly to the claim that the people have the right

to "[cashier] their governors for misconduct" or to "form a government for [itself]," in a purely democratic fashion? (p. 27)? On what grounds does Burke defend the Glorious Revolution? Why is Burke so skeptical of enthusiasm in politics? Why is he leery of too much emphasis on the rights of man, although he does not deny that men indeed have rights? Why does he claim that "man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against not only our reason but our instinct"? (p. 91) On what grounds does he defend the establishment of religion? In what sense does he consider society a contract? (p. 96) On what grounds does Burke condemn the French seizures of church property? He writes that "a disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman." (pp. 157-8) What does he mean, and how does he apply this maxim to France?

Week Six

*Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1 (Colonial Press, 1900), 3-16, 191-199, 258-273.

*Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2 (Colonial Press, 1900), 36-41, 99-159, 202-27.

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

If possible, please read all of the assigned selections from Tocqueville for the class on Tuesday. I am not sure that we will actually have time to discuss the entirety of the Tocqueville assignment, but we should be able to reach some of the assigned sections of the second volume. I am eager to discuss as much as we can of the Tocqueville because I think that this discussion will help students who have chosen to write essays on Tocqueville's debt to Montesquieu. That essay will require that students understand the claims made by Tocqueville. The assigned selection from Tocqueville is as follows:

I suggest that before reading the assigned selections from Tocqueville that you read Francois Furet's "The Intellectual Origins of Tocqueville's Thought," *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville* 7 (1985/86): 117-29. This essay is also found in the coursepack and in the Resources section of the course website.

When you read the Tocqueville, would you please consider the following questions.

Why does Tocqueville claim, in the introduction to his book, that the coming of democracy is inevitable? What are the benefits of the two alternative forms of society and government, in his view aristocracy and democracy? Why, in his view, has France enjoyed none of the advantages of the democratic forms of state and society that came to characterize the country after the Revolution? Why are the Americans in a different position? What does Tocqueville propose to learn from his study of the United States?

What are the dangers created for Europe by what Tocqueville describes as the inevitable progress of democracy? Why is tyranny of the majority, for Tocqueville, an inherent danger of democracy? How does the majority exercise its power over minorities? In what ways have American habits and institutions diminished this danger? Why are

Americans dominated by individualism? What problems does this cause? In what respects are the problems Tocqueville believes arise from individualism similar to the problems of modern societies as diagnosed by Rousseau? How do American institutions and American circumstances reduce the dangers associated with individualism? What use have Americans made of associations, and why does Tocqueville view the association as critical to the defense of liberty in democratic eras? What role does Tocqueville believe religious belief can play in democratic ages? In what respects are Tocqueville's views of religion and the role it can play in society similar to or different from those of Montesquieu? How has democracy changed the institution of the family and the place of women? Why have democratic habits threatened the legitimacy of the family, according to Tocqueville? What new forms of legitimacy have the Americans found for the family? Why does Tocqueville claim that "if I were asked, now that I am drawing to the close of this work, in which I have spoken of so many important things done by the Americans, to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of that people ought mainly be attributed, I should reply - to the superiority of their women"? (p. 224)

February 18 - No class - Spring Reading Week

Week Eight

Continuation of the discussion of Tocqueville, and a comparison of Tocqueville and Montesquieu.

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

Week Nine

*Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Everyman's Library, 1929), 3-13, 23-35, 58-63, 154-164, 203-215.

*Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 1-9, 23-45.

Below are questions to consider as you read the assigned selections from Wollstonecraft and from Barbara Caine's book on English feminism.

1. On what forms of female dependence and subordination does Wollstonecraft focus?
2. What are the effects of these forms of subordination and dependence on women, according to Wollstonecraft?
3. How does the subordination and dependence of women affect children and men?

4. What qualities does Wollstonecraft hope to see women acquire as a result of gaining greater equality with men? How will the gaining of equality by women change the nature of the relationship between men and women, according to Wollstonecraft?
5. What is the nature of the intellectual debt that Wollstonecraft owes to Rousseau?
6. According to Caine, what is Wollstonecraft's position in the intellectual history of the movement for women's emancipation? What made her such a controversial figure, even in feminist circles? What are Caine's criticisms of her work? Does the description of Wollstonecraft in the memoirs of her husband, William Godwin, as described by Caine, add to or detract from her stature as "the founding figure of modern feminism," as Caine calls her (p. 24)?

Week Ten

*G.W.F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by T.M. Knox (Clarendon Press, 1942), 10-13, 155-174.

Jerry Muller, *The Mind and the Market. Capitalism in Western Thought* (Hegel: A Life Worth Choosing), 139-165.

I strongly suggest beginning first with the chapter on Hegel in Jerry Muller's *The Mind and the Market*. My questions here will begin with Muller.

1. Muller states on page 140 that Hegel believed that "history had to be understood philosophically" and that "philosophy could only be understood historically." What does this claim mean? (p. 140)
2. Muller argues that Hegel's purpose in *Philosophy of Right* is to "reconcile his contemporaries to the realities of the modern world." How does Hegel propose to accomplish this objective? (p. 143)
3. What role did the civil service of the different German states come to play in the first half of the nineteenth century? (pp. 144-7) How was the creation of individual freedom of inhabitants of German states, and especially of Prussia, linked to the development, and the power, of the "general estate"? (p. 147)
4. What role did Hegel claim that Protestantism played in the development of the conceptualization of individuals as the subjects of history?
5. In what respects does Hegel oppose the arguments of Rousseau, as expressed in the *Discourse on Inequality*? (pp. 152-3)
6. What purpose in the development of the higher possibility of individuals is served by the institution of private property? (pp. 155-6) In what respects is Hegel's analysis of the benefits of private property similar to, or different from, Montesquieu's arguments for the beneficial consequences of commerce?
7. To what extent does Hegel's interpretation of the positive role of associations similar to, or different from, that of Tocqueville? (p. 159)

8. For what purposes should the state intervene in the operation of the free market?
(pp. 159-61)
9. What is the philosophical purpose of the family, according to Hegel?

Questions based on the assignment from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. In the pages I have photocopied, please read the following sections: pages 10-13; pages 155-157 (sections 257 and 258, with comments); pages 160-162 (sections 260-262); pages 164-174 (sections 270 and 271).

What does Hegel mean by the following statements:

p. 10 "What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational." (For the German speakers in the class: "Was *vernünftig* ist, das ist *wirklich*; und was *wirklich* ist, das ist *vernünftig*.")

p. 10 "Nothing is actual except the Idea. Once that is granted, the great thing is to apprehend in the show of the temporal and the transient the substance which is imminent and the eternal which is present. For since rationality (which is synonymous with the Idea) enters upon external existence simultaneously with its actualization, it emerges with an infinite wealth of forms, shapes, and appearances"?

p. 11 "This book, containing as it does the science of the state, is to be nothing other than the endeavour to apprehend and portray the state as something inherently rational."

p. 12 "To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present and thereby to enjoy the present, this is the rational insight which reconciles us to the actual . . ."

p. 12 "It is a sheer obstinacy, the obstinacy which does honour to mankind, to refuse to recognize in conviction anything not ratified by thought. This obstinacy is the characteristic of our epoch, besides being the principle peculiar to Protestantism." What would Burke have thought of this claim?

p. 12 "There is less chill in the peace with the world which knowledge supplies."

p. 13 "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."

p. 155 "The state is the actuality of the ethical Idea."

p. 156 "Since the state is mind objectified, it is only as one of its members that the individual himself as objectivity, genuine individuality, and an ethical life."

p. 156 "If we ask what is or has been the historical origin of the state in general, still more if we ask about the origin of any particular state . . . all these questions are no concern of the Idea of the state."

p. 157 "Confronted with the claims made for the individual will, we must remember the fundamental conception that the objective will is rationality implicit or in conception, whether it be recognized or not by individuals, whether their whims be deliberate or not."

Skip from footnote six at the bottom of page 157 to page 160.

p. 161 "The principle of modern states has prodigious strength and depth because because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the

extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet at the same time brings it back to the substantive unity and so maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself.”

pp. 166-8 What aspects of the influence of religion does Hegel criticize, and which does he praise?

Footnote at page 168: Why should states tolerate religious minorities like Quakers, Anabaptists, and even Jews, according to Hegel?

pp. 170 -174 What is the proper relationship between church and state?

Week Eleven

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Norton), 13-84, 114-125.

Eric Foner, *Give me Liberty! An American History* (Norton, 3rd edition), 416-42.

*David Blight, *Frederick Douglass. Prophet of Freedom* (Simon & Schuster, 2018), xiii-xx, 1-18, 94-115.

The principal text for next week's class is Frederick Douglass' 1845 narrative of his life. I have also assigned Douglass' 1852 speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?", which is also found in this volume. Two secondary assignments are available on the course website, an excerpt from Eric Foner's history of the United States, which provides some basic background information about slavery in the United States in the period in which Douglass wrote, and excerpts from David Blight's biography of Douglass, which won the Pulitzer Prize.

Frederick Douglass' memoirs were written (and spoken – they were likely composed in large part from his presentations to abolitionist audiences) in part with the aim of enlightening white northern audiences about the many evils of slavery, and in part with the more specific aim of rebutting the many lies and half-truths spread about slavery by its defenders.

Our discussion of the assigned texts will be based in part on the following questions:

The Narrative of Douglass' Life:

1. What consequences does slavery have for the African American, according to Douglass' account in his autobiography?
2. In what respects does Douglass appear to be attempting to counter the pro-slavery propaganda of the defenders of slavery in the period in which he wrote, based especially on Foner's account, pp. 422-428?
3. What is the effect of slavery on whites, both those who participate in the system directly, as owners and overseers and their family members, and on the non-slave owning populations of the South and North, according to Douglass' account?

“What to the slave is the Fourth of July?”

This is a draft outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

1. What lessons does Douglass draw from the Revolutionary War? What does he celebrate and what does he condemn?
2. Why does Douglass consider the Declaration of Independence the “Ring-bolt” of the American nation’s destiny? (p. 118)
2. Of what does he accuse the members of the audience? (pp. 120-24)

David Blight’s Biography of Douglass

1. How did Douglass judge Lincoln in his Washington speech of 1876, the subject of the first chapter of Blight’s book?
2. How might the fact that Douglass’ autobiography – one can suppose - originated in large part as speeches to white audiences of abolitionists as Blight describes, affect how it was composed?

Week Twelve

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and the Subjection of Women* (Penguin Classics:2007). Please read the entirety of *On Liberty*.

*John Rees, John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* (Clarendon Press, 1985), 78-105.

Week Thirteen

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

Below are a few questions to consider when reading Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*.

1. Woolf’s essay at various points calls into question what she describes as the pursuit of “Truth.” For example, on page six of the Broadview Press edition of the essay Woolf writes that on controversial subjects – like sex – “one cannot hope to tell the truth.” On the next page she writes that “lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them.” What does this mean? How does Woolf attempt to approach the truth in this area without claiming more than one can know? What is the method of the essay?
2. How does this claim about the nature of truth relate to Woolf’s passion for fiction, poetry, plays, and prose?
3. On page seven: “To the right and left bushes of some sort, golden and crimson, glowed with the colour, even it seemed burnt with the heat, of fire.” What does this image recall (hint: Exodus) and what does it mean in the context of this essay?
4. Why does Woolf write that whatever “let its line down in the stream” might be called Thought, but that this actually was “a prouder name than it deserved”? What is proud about thought?
5. What is the purpose of beginning this essay with the image of fishing?

This is a draft outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

6. “Instinct rather than reason came to my help.” (p. 8) Why was it instinct and not reason?
7. What is the point of the chain of associations found on page nine and ten?
8. What is the meaning of the images of centuries of labor required to build the colleges that appear before her? (pp. 12-13)
9. What, page 14, produces the “subtle and subterranean glow” that is more profound than the “hard little electric light that we call brilliance”? And why does she then shift her thoughts to memories of Oxbridge before the war (the First World War – the essay was composed in 1928) and of men and women whom she imagined were singing or humming poems? What has changed?
10. What, p. 19, were the prewar illusions that have been lost, and why were they precious? Are they at all like the illusions Burke discusses, p. 77, the “pleasing illusions that made power gentle and obedience liberal”?
11. Why is it, on the next page, that it seems to Woolf that “the lilac was shaking its flower over the garden walls, and the brimstone butterflies were scudding hither and thither, and the dust of pollen was in the air,” although “in fact” it was autumn and the leaves were yellow and falling? What was the “flash of some terrible reality . . . leaping out of the heart of spring”? (p. 21) What was that reality?
12. What does she conclude from her description of the comparative poverty of the few women’s colleges at Oxbridge? (p. 29)
13. What does she conclude about society’s supposed knowledge of women from her visit to the British Library? (pp. 31-44)
14. What was the significance to Woolf of her aunt’s death? (pp. 45-48)
15. Why does Woolf find it inconceivable that a woman might have developed the gifts of a Shakespeare in the 16th century, or really at any point up until, well, some not entirely clear point in the future? What does the fate of Shakespeare’s imagined sister reveal? (pp. 56-69) What does Woolf mean by the claim that to be a Shakespeare required an incandescent mind, a mind without obstacles? (p. 69)
16. What does Woolf attempt to show in chapter four? (pp. 70-93) Why did novels become the genre preferred by women authors in the late 18th and 19th centuries? In what were these novels of women often deficient, according to Woolf? (pp. 85, 87-93) What is it about Jane Austen, and in particular about *Pride and Prejudice*, that Woolf so admires? (pp. 81-82)
17. Is Woolf at all interested in virtue, a key subject for Wollstonecraft? (see, for example, p. 105)
18. What possibilities should be pursued now that women have, for the first time, the chance to write fiction, with a tradition of their own, and, with some luck and hard work, with an independent income and space and time? (Chapter five)
19. What does Woolf mean by the claim that “the androgynous mind is resonant and porous”? (p. 116) Note that she praises Shakespeare in these terms. (p. 121)
20. What purpose does the quotation from Sir Arthur (Quillet-Couch) serve in the context of the essay? (pp. 125-127)

Additional Statements

Communication policies: I am happy to speak with students after class, or during my weekly office hours. If these times are not convenient, I am happy to arrange alternative times to meet. I am in my office most days of the week. Please write me at enathans@uwo.ca to schedule a time to talk. I am also happy to talk by phone or via Zoom.

Classroom behavior: Please turn off cell phones and refrain from using any recording devices during the class. Please remove earbuds during the class.

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI): Students may use artificial intelligence tools in studying for the class and in preparing essays. However, if you take language from an AI source, the words taken must be placed in quotation marks, and ideas footnoted, just as is the case with any other secondary source. I expect all essays for this class to be drawn from the assigned editions of texts. Essays with footnotes to sources other than the assigned sources will receive failing grades. Each essay must be primarily the student's own work, as is the case now with respect to the use of more conventional secondary sources. It may in fact be advisable to avoid AI as a source primarily because it may impede independent reflection. Note that AI often makes very general claims, and is likely not to reflect the particular conversations on which this course focuses.

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.