

THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

Objectives

First, this is a liberal arts elective focused on a few Great Books from the traditional canon of Western Civilization. ‘Cultivating my garden’ *and asking you to cultivate your own*, I hope to encourage both critical reading and effective writing (the course satisfies the W-2 graduation requirement). I will present the French Enlightenment as a watershed to something like modernity. Generalizing outrageously, beforehand, the Christian God was sovereign, and the Faith was preeminent; afterward, the dear self is sovereign, and egocentric reason if not will or appetite has displaced religion. There were related movements elsewhere, but nowhere was an anti-Christian rationalism so aggressive as it was in France.

Second, the Enlightenment is a significant subject of historical inquiry in its own right, in part because of the interplay of cultural persistence and radical change in the ideas, values, and beliefs of these influential thinkers and in part because of the relative accessibility of source materials. *Homo sapiens* is the articulate primate, able to express himself and to challenge others. The major works of the authors discussed are readily available in modern translations, and we have local or regional access to many related materials in French-language editions. Therefore, independent projects based on primary sources are possible for undergraduate students of such intellectual history, if few other sub-disciplines.

Third, I hope to serve French majors, although the course does not presume knowledge of that language. For those of you with some facility, I encourage its use, which will greatly extend your reach. Even read in translation, the authors assigned form a roll call of greats from a period in which the prestige of French letters was unrivaled by that of any other Continental literature. Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia, for instance, were French-speaking patrons of the French *philosophes*. All this said, I would welcome term-paper projects on the Enlightenment outside the Francophone world, especially in England, Scotland, and America, and the Ladd Library can support them.

Assigned Texts, in order of use (all classes will presume books in hand)

Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Lafleur. Prentice-Hall
ISBN-13 978 00236 72606

Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*, trans. Betts. Penguin
ISBN-13 978 01404 42816

Voltaire, *Candide, Zadig, and Other Stories*, trans. Frame. NAL Signet
ISBN-13 978 04515 28094

Voltaire, *The Philosophical Dictionary*, trans. Besterman. Penguin
ISBN-13 978 01404 42571

Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Foxley. J.M. Dent/Everyman
ISBN-13 978 04608 73802

Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew and D'Alembert's Dream*, trans. Tancock. Penguin
ISBN-13 978 01404 41734

Hacker, Diana, *Rules for Writers*, 6th ed. Bedford/St. Martin's
ISBN-13 978 03124 52766

Requirements and Expectations

I don't suppose that you came to Bates College to be taught somebody else's ideas about the French Enlightenment, but you did come to learn to read better, to write better, and to manage your own time better. I can help you to learn something about most of these things, at some cost to us both. You must respect our common calendar and accomplish what you can within the limits of the time available, whatever may be your competing obligations and your other interests. That, in turn, means starting essays and papers early and completing them punctually. All ESL students and seniors writing fall theses may request extended deadlines but must do so in advance. Otherwise, I do not grant extensions to individuals on the basis of overwork. I do routinely allow a penalty-free grace period for everyone extending until noon on the scheduled Monday after the Friday due date, but after that, unless a dean has formally authorized an extension on medical or personal grounds, I will deduct one full grade. **No electronic submission of essays or papers. No late work accepted for credit after Wednesday, December 16.**

- 25%** **perceived effort:** regular attendance with assigned book in hand, quizzes or exercises on the readings most Wednesdays and some other days, informed participation in class, early start and sustained work on research and writing projects culminating in term papers.
- 50%** **three documented essays**, max 4 pp., 1.25" margins, 12 pt. font, double-space, paginate: 1.) Montesquieu, due Oct. 2; 2.) Voltaire, due Oct. 30; 3.) Rousseau, due Nov. 20. Essays due at Friday class; grace period to Monday class; penalty for further lateness.
- 25%** **documented term paper**, min. 10 pp., 1.25" margins, 12 pt. font, double-space, paginate; completed paper with documentation (MLA-style parentheses or Chicago-style notes) and list of works cited or bibliography due Friday, Dec. 11; grace period to Monday noon.

Mutual expectations are more important than any requirements that I alone might set for you alone. You can expect me to take you, our course, and its subject matter seriously. I welcome questions about these thinkers and their books, criticisms of them, or objections to my interpretations. I will be happy to talk individually about essays or papers, especially at early stages, and willing to offer constructive comments on any draft pre-submitted in reasonably good form two full days before it is nominally due (a Wednesday before a Friday). Finally, you can expect that I will attempt to evaluate your written work fairly, looking for proper form as well as for substantial content, and to return it promptly. Although in all this I betray my own focus on the 'dear self,' what you expect of yourself and one another --and are willing to ask of yourself and one another in every sense-- is more crucial than whatever I can bring to the table. I can't bring your willingness to engage with the material, with me, or with classmates.

In turn, I expect you to prepare responsibly, attend regularly, and bring and use the assigned texts. Inevitably, unpreparedness, absences, or merely passive attendance will suggest to me that you aren't trying hard enough. Such behavior hurts more than yourself alone by lowering other's morale, including mine, and by hampering a pedagogy premised on willing participation. If you want to be lectured to, just let me know: I can do that. But if you want to discuss the material, you've got to be willing to talk with and listen to one another, not just to respond to my promptings or to answer me when questioned by me. I also expect you to take pride in your written work and to understand that any grade reflects my evaluation of that work, not your mind, still less, your person. I expect a respect for other persons, including dead ones, and beliefs, including those that you do not share. I expect *you* to be alive--and curious. Show me! Ask. Object. Inquire. In 1784, Kant found a motto for the Enlightenment in the words of the Latin poet Horace: "*Sapere aude!* (Dare to think!)" That is, in so many words, take yourself seriously.

Course Outline and Schedule of Assignments

Week #1. Bookends I

Read Descartes, *Discourse* (1637), Parts One and Two, and Kant, *What is Enlightenment?* (1784).

- Weds. 09/09 Introduction to the Course and the Enlightenment; Kant's Summation of an Ideal
 Fri. 09/11 The Schooling of a Christian Humanist and Intellectual Rebellion of a Young Genius

Week #2. Descartes

Read Descartes, *Discourse*, Parts Three-Six; reading quiz Wednesday on Parts Three and Four.

- Mon. 09/14 The Sermon on the Mount and the Moral Code of a Bold Thinker but Timorous Man
 Weds. 09/16 Metaphysics: Descartes's First Certainties and Cartesian Dualism **Quiz**
 Fri. 09/18 The Galileo Affair as Historical Context and Descartes's Vision of Modern Sciences

Week #3. Montesquieu I

Read Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, #1-85; film Tuesday evening; take-home exercise Wednesday.

- Mon. 09/21 Cultural Relativism: The Jesuits' *Curious and Edifying Letters* and the *Persian Letters*
 Tues. 09/22 Film: *Black Robe* (place and time TBA; if you can't make it, view Library copy)
 Weds. 09/23 Discussion of the film in light of its historical sources and modern sympathies **Exercise due**
 Fri. 09/25 Human Nature: Theological Orthodoxy, Social Satire, and 'Philosophical' Universals

Week #4. Montesquieu II

Complete *Persian Letters*; essay topic due Wednesday; **Montesquieu essay due Friday, Oct. 2***

- Mon. 09/28 The Good Book on Women and Sexuality; Montesquieu's Libertinism and the Harem Theme
 Weds. 09/30 Essay topics: Bring a **written statement of your topic** and be ready to discuss it.
 Fri. 10/02 Political Liberalism and Forms of Government in *Persian Letters* and *The Spirit of the Laws*:

***Montesquieu essay: For stipulations on submission, length, format, grace period, etc.,** see above, page two. **For constructive commentary prior to final revisions and submission for grading,** pre-submit a full draft to me by Wednesday, Sept. 30, or consult with a Peer Writing Assistant. **For assessment criteria and general advice,** see below, pages six and seven. Finally, for this first essay but not for others, within one week after receiving a disappointing grade, you may submit a revised version for an additional grade; in this case, I will average the two grades.

Week #5. Voltaire I

Read Leibniz and Pope handout; Voltaire, *Candide* (not other tales); Wednesday reading quiz.

- Mon. 10/05 Philosophical Optimism and Good Lives: Yours, the Lawyer's, and My Late Mother's
 Weds. 10/07 *Candide*'s Experiences and Voltaire's Methodical Refutation of Leibniz and Pope **Quiz**
 Fri. 10/09 'Woe is We': Causes of Human Ills, the Mentors' Prescriptions, and *Candide*'s Conclusion

Week #6. Voltaire II

Begin Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*; Wednesday open-book quiz-like event on pp. 15-229.

- Mon. 10/12 The Truth Value of Christianity I: Voltaire the Critical Historian
 Weds. 10/14 Truth Value II: Voltaire the Natural Scientist and Philosophical Rationalist **Quiz-like event**
 Fri. 10/16 The Creeds of the Church and the Question of What, If Anything, Voltaire *Did* Believe

Week #7. Voltaire III

Complete Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*.

- Mon. 10/19 No class. Individual conferences on your ideas for a Voltaire essay.
 Weds. 10/21 Give me a Break! OK: Take a break.
 Fri. 10/23 Give me a longer Break! OK: Stay away.

Week #8. Voltaire IV

No new reading assignment; reading quiz Wednesday; **Voltaire essay due Friday, Oct. 30.***

- Mon. 10/26 The *Philosophical Dictionary* and the Moral Value of Christianity
 Weds. 10/28 The *Philosophical Dictionary* and Voltaire's Social and Political Ideals **Quiz**
 Fri. 10/30 The Calas Case and Voltaire as Advocate for Justice, Toleration, and Judicial Reform

***Voltaire essay: For stipulations on submission, length, format, grace period, etc.,** see above, page two. **For constructive commentary prior to final revisions and submission for grading,** pre-submit a full draft to me by Wednesday, Oct. 28, or consult with a Peer Writing Assistant in the Ladd Library. **For assessment criteria and general advice,** see below, pages six and seven.

Week #9. Rousseau I

Read *Emile*, Books I-III; take-home exercise Wednesday.

- Mon. 11/02 A Tale of Two Chateaux: Jean-Jacques's Frustration and Rousseau's Illumination
 Weds. 11/04 *Emile*'s Good Nature and Rousseau's Radical Educational Theory **Exercise due**
 Fri. 11/06 Rousseau's Democratic Ideology and Problematical Ideals

Week #10. Rousseau II

Read *Emile*, Book IV; individual **term-paper conference by the end of this week***

- Mon. 11/09 *Emile*'s 'Second Birth' and Rousseau's Pedagogical Reversal
 Weds. 11/11 "The Creed of the Savoyard Priest": The Philosophical Theology of a Warm Deist
 Fri. 11/13 LADD LIBRARY CLASS: The Arts and Sciences of Locating Relevant Scholarship

***Term paper conference and prospectus:** Research and writing projects, like red wines, take time to mature. No true student of French culture wants to drink yesterday's pressings, so much insipid grape juice. If you have not already conferred on possible term paper projects, see me this week. An essay that you have written on Montesquieu or Voltaire or that you will be writing on Rousseau could serve as a good starting point. You need not restrict yourself to these authors or their compatriots, as stated above; we have remarkable resources on the Enlightenment in the English-speaking world. In any case, I'd be glad to play Mentor, helping you to sharpen your point, to consider alternatives, and to

understand what is apt to be feasible and what is not. Reference librarians are also ready to help, if you only ask but only if you ask. The Good Master promises: “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Matt. 7.7); unaccountably, Jesus fails to add that if you fail to ask, no one, neither God nor man, can well give you an answer, and you’ll be on your own. The mantra for the Enlightenment is to ‘think for yourself,’ not ‘by yourself.’ I will severely penalize the perceived-effort course grade of anyone who does not both confer substantially with me by the end of this week and submit a one or two page prospectus of the research project by Wednesday, November 18, stating the topic or problem that you want to explore and specifying the source materials and the scholarly commentary that you expect to use in your research and writing.

Week #11. Rousseau III

Read *Emile*, Book V; **term paper prospectus due Wednesday, Nov. 18; Rousseau essay due Friday, Nov. 20.***

Mon. 11/16 *Emile*, Book V: The First Modern Democrat and the Second Sex

Weds. 11/18 JJR’s ‘Abandonment’ of His Children I: Rationalization and ‘Confession’ **Prospectus due**

Fri. 11/20 JJR’s ‘Abandonment’ II: Historical Explanations of a Repeated Moral Lapse

***Rousseau essay: For stipulations on submission, length, format, grace period, etc.,** see above, page two. **For constructive commentary prior to final revisions and submission for grading,** pre-submit a full draft to me by Wednesday, Nov. 18, or consult with a Peer Writing Assistant in the Ladd Library. **For assessment criteria and general advice,** see below, pages six and seven.

Week #12. Diderot I

Read *Rameau’s Nephew*; bring a Top Ten list of the Nephew’s most despicable words and actions to Monday class.

Mon. 11/30 Third Person Singular: The Nephew as a Perfectly Despicable Anti-Hero **Top Ten list due**

Weds. 12/02 First Person Singular: The Philosopher as an Imperfectly Attractive Hero

Fri. 12/04 Metaphysics, Mime, Music, and the Philosophical Dialogue as an Art Form

Week #13. Diderot II

No further reading assignment; bring Diderot to Monday class; **term paper due Friday, Dec. 11.***

Mon. 12/07 Coming Full Circle? From Descartes’s Dream-Visions to Diderot’s Pseudo-Dreams

Weds. 12/09 No class.

Fri. 12/11 No class.

***Term paper: For stipulations on submission, length, format, grace period, etc.,** see above, page two. **For constructive commentary prior to final revisions and submission for grading,** pre-submit a full draft to me by Wednesday, Dec. 9, or consult with Peer Writing Assistants in the Ladd Library. **For assessment criteria and general advice,** see below, pages six and seven.

Summary Statement of Criteria for the Evaluation of Essays and Term Papers

- 1.) **Topic:** Formulate an analytically fruitful question or problem for yourself, that is, one that begins with curiosity and can sustain productive inquiry, so that the resultant paper is not merely a descriptive recapitulation of what the author –or a scholarly authority or the professor himself– has said.
- 2.) **Knowledge:** Demonstrate a familiarity with the assigned text (for the shorter essays) or the chosen work(s) or other historical subject matter in question (for term papers) along with a sophisticated understanding of the ideas, beliefs, values, and/or modes of argument of the thinker(s) being studied.
- 3.) **Argument:** Unify your paper conceptually, making an analytical point or a set of closely related points; such ‘argument’ need not entail contention or fault-finding. The ideals are coherence, forcefulness when possible, qualification when necessary, and a self-critical awareness of interpretive alternatives.
- 4.) **Documentation:** Identify your sources formally, using either MLA-style parenthetical citations (conventional in the humanities, convenient for shorter essays in History 223) or Chicago-style notes (conventional in history, preferable for term papers that require reference to scholarship).
- 5.) **‘Writing’:** Strive for clarity, correctness, and concision. Of course, no one little comma-error or typo matters much, and good writing is artful as well as rule-ful. But here you are addressing an attentive academic reader, not ‘expressing yourself,’ and too many errors will be distracting and may be annoying.

Discussion of the Five Criteria and Advice for Writers

- 1.) **Topics:** This is a second-level college writing course, and significant responsibility devolves on you to chart your own course for each essay and paper. The best, however short or long, begin with the best questions or problems. I won’t prescribe topics, much less tell you what to write. That said, I may be able to help you clarify your own thinking and will be happy to make suggestions on the basis of a wider familiarity with this material and a longer experience with what is feasible and what is not. For shorter essays, think of yourself as a grander Goldilocks: Some topics are still too big for you, some, too small; find one that’s just right for you, for investigation with materials that are immediately accessible, for consideration within the time that is available, and for discussion in about a thousand words. Too mature for fairy tales? Think of your essay as an inverted funnel: Start narrow, focusing sharply on something quite limited, and then broaden out, showing its more general significance. For term papers, I insist on a graded written prospectus and a related individual conference well in advance of the due date.
- 2.) **Knowledge:** I want you to show me that you are well informed about the assigned texts (essays) or chosen subject matter (term papers). This sort of familiarity is obviously fundamental. I also want to encourage and to reward more sophisticated interpretations and critical understandings of the material, the individual thinkers, and the culture that they helped to shape. This is more conceptual and more difficult; ‘think *for yourself*’ is the mantra of the Enlightenment and the course, but that doesn’t necessarily mean ‘think *by yourself*.’ Going to school with the books and papers of scholarly specialists can be instructive even on briefs; it is absolutely essential for term papers, and, of course, it takes time. Start early. Consult often. If you have a question about our texts or your research, ask it. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be

opened unto you” (Matt. 7: 7). My office door is open most of the time, and you are always free to knock, if it isn’t. The Reference Librarians in Ladd are always on station.

3.) Argument: You’ve got to have an idea, develop it conceptually, and explain its significance. This is what good academic writing is ‘all about.’ Obviously, no one else can give you ideas that will be your own, but, paradoxically, you can often develop or even discover your ideas in the course of trying to explain them to someone else, even someone not (as) familiar with the particular subject matter: The best way of improving your papers is to make certain that someone, possibly a classmate, a roommate, a peer tutor, a writing professional, or even your professor (see syllabus page 2), always gets a look at a late draft before you submit it for grading, looking for its ‘argument.’

4.) Documentation: MLA-style parenthetical citation is conventional in the humanities and convenient for essays. In most cases, it requires no more than the author’s last name and a page number or numbers, like this (Montesquieu 142-43, 150). Note that no comma separates the author’s name from the page number(s). If the author’s name is contextually obvious, omit it (142-43, 150). If you refer to multiple works by the same author, you may need to use short titles (*Letters* 142-43, 150). Any such a parenthetical citation precedes the period or other sentence-ending punctuation, as above, but follows any quotation marks. Append to a MLA-style paper a list of Works Cited, alpha-ordered by author’s family name or conventional title, following this exact format:

Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de. *Persian Letters*. Trans. C. J. Betts. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1973.

For further details and almost all imaginable special cases, see Hacker, *Rules for Writers*, #55.

Chicago-style foot– or endnoting is conventional in the discipline of history and preferable for term papers in this course, both to learn this alternative system and to allow for more complex citations of scholarship without encumbering the text. The first citation to a given book includes the author’s full name (and title, if appropriate) and full publication details along with the page number, in this manner; variants to the conventional format are apt to suggest your ignorance, carelessness, or willfulness:

¹Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, trans. C. J. Betts (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1973), 142-43, 150.

All subsequent notes to the same book provide only the necessary identifying information:

²Montesquieu, 180.

Append a formal Bibliography; works are listed as above, under MLA Works Cited.

For further details and special cases, see on-line alternatives or one of the following handbooks: Jules R. Benjamin, *A Student’s Guide to History*; Charles Lipson, *Doing Honest Work in College*; Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing History*; Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers*.

5.) ‘Writing’: I will make numerically coded editorial annotations keyed to Hacker’s *Rules for Writers*. You are then responsible for reviewing and mastering the relevant Rules before the next essay or paper.