

## HIST 426/526: CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Prof. Ian F. McNeely – University of Oregon – Spring 2011 – CRN 36317/36318

**Meeting times:** MW 10:00-11:20 in 176 ED

**Office hours:** MW 12:30-1:30 (except 4/4, 4/18, 5/2, and 5/16) and by appt. in 319 MCK

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### Description

The Enlightenment was one of the most dynamic periods in European history and had an enormous impact on the entire modern world. It gave us, among other things, attitudes toward science, religion, history, economics, sex, government, and education that still dominate our thinking and institutions today. The Enlightenment spans the period from roughly the 1690s through the 1780s in Europe and America. Its chronological bookends in the realm of political history are the Glorious Revolution in England in 1688 and the French Revolution in 1789. In the realm of ideas, the Enlightenment arguably began with John Locke's writings ca. 1690 and culminated in Immanuel Kant's three *Critiques* in the 1780s.

Our course, however, focuses on the realm of culture, and in particular literate culture. We'll begin with an entertaining and insightful urban ethnography of prerevolutionary Paris. We'll also be reading other less canonical texts that are fascinating as bellwethers for broader cultural changes during this epoch.

This is a reading-intensive class: do not sign up for it unless you are, or are willing to become, a "textual learner." Scholars of the Enlightenment set models of clarity, elegance, and wit in prose writing that have not been rivaled since, and any cultural history of the period must attend first and foremost to the sheer profusion of written texts it produced.

### Assignments

*For undergraduates (HIST 426)*

- Four unannounced quizzes (10% each, only *one* of which can be made up)
- Final exam, Fri. Jun. 10, 10:15am-12:15pm (30%)
- Imitation exercise, ca. 10-12 pages, due Tue. Jun. 7 by 4pm in 319 MCK (30%; for details see below)

*For graduate students (HIST 526)*

- Four unannounced quizzes (30% total)
- Final exam, Fri. Jun. 10, 10:15am-12:15pm (30%)
- Historiographical essay, ca. 20-25 pages, due Tue. Jun. 7 by 4pm in 319 MCK (40%; for details see me)

### **Books for purchase**

- Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2006)
- Louis-Sebastien Mercier, *Panorama of Paris*, ed. Jeremy Popkin (Penn State, 1999)
- Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters* (Knopf, 1992)
- Julien Offroy de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine and Man a Plant* (Hackett, 1994)
- Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean 1789-1804* (St. Martins, 2006)

All the required readings will be on two-hour reserve at Knight library.

### **SCHEDULE**

#### **1. Cultural history**

(3/28) Outram, ch. 1

(3/30) Roger Schmidt, "Caffeine and the Coming of the Enlightenment," *Raritan* 23 no. 1 (Summer 2003): 129-149 [PDF from [Blackboard](#)]

#### **2. The public sphere**

(4/4) Outram, ch. 2; Mercier, 1-17

(4/6) Mercier, 23-92

#### **3. Government**

(4/11) Outram, ch. 3; Mercier, 92-165

(4/13) Mercier, 165-230

#### **4. Europeanness**

(4/18) Outram, ch. 4; Montagu vii-xxiv, 91-102

(4/20) Montagu, 102-162

***Students in HIST 526 should read:*** "AHR Forum: New Perspectives on the Enlightenment," *American Historical Review* 115 no. 5 (Dec. 2010): 1340-1435.

## 5. Gender

(4/25) Outram, ch. 6; Montagu, 162-88, and reread sections on Turkish women  
(4/27) Montagu, 18-37, 376-78, 417-23, 467-72

## 6. Science

(5/2) Outram, ch. 7; La Mettrie, 1-15  
(5/4) La Mettrie, 27-48

## 7. Religion

(5/9) Outram, ch. 8; La Mettrie, 48-76  
(5/11) Georges Buffon, “The Nomenclature of Apes” [PDF on [Blackboard](#)]

## 8. Slavery

(5/16) Outram, ch. 5; Dubois & Garrigus, 7-23  
(5/18) Dubois & Garrigus, 47-85

## 9. Revolution

(5/23) Outram, ch. 9; Dubois & Garrigus, 24-40  
(5/25) Dubois & Garrigus, 86-132

## 10. Conclusions

(5/30) Memorial Day holiday  
(6/1) [Encyclopédie](#) (read 3 articles of your choice)

### Imitation exercise

This exercise allows you to try your hand at Enlightenment-era prose style by imitating Mercier, Montagu, La Mettrie, or another eighteenth-century writer. The objective is to produce a 6-8 page piece of writing that might have been penned by one of these authors. The catch is that it should, at the same time, also be a nonfiction historical reconstruction based on original research, and for this you’ll have to do some detective work in the library.

The format is up to you – be creative! – but here are some ideas to stimulate your thinking. *Note than I am happy to give you references to get you started on your research and have posted some research aids at the end of this webpage.*

If you like *Mercier*, you might delve more deeply into some aspect of Parisian culture he mentions – opera, for example – or unearth one of your own, such as freemasonry. Or you might pick a European city besides Paris, find out what life there was like in the

1700s, and compose an urban vignette or two in the style of the Panorama of Paris. You'll want to focus, as Mercier does, on a few salient details and not attempt to provide a comprehensive account. Good choices for "Enlightenment-friendly" cities are Vienna, Austria; Berlin, Prussia; Edinburgh and Glasgow, Scotland; London, England; and St. Petersburg, Russia. It's also possible to investigate attempts to bring Enlightenment to the countryside.

If you like *Montagu*, you might pick a region of the world besides Turkey and find out what Europeans knew (or thought they knew) about that region in the eighteenth century. You could then use this knowledge to write an imaginary travelogue critiquing European customs and culture from the perspective of a foreign visitor. China, India, Russia, and the South Pacific Islands (Tahiti, Hawaii, etc.) are good choices, as are the Native Americans and ancient Egyptians.

If you like *La Mettrie* or *Buffon*, you might pursue any of the celebrated experiments or case studies they cite and reconstruct the "scientific" knowledge available about it during the eighteenth century. The aim would be to marshal the raw data of natural history and/or experimental science to grapple with some of the deeper philosophical issues raised during the Enlightenment. Good choices are Trembley's polyp, Vaucanson's mechanical duck; the chess-playing automaton; the debate about animal souls and animal cruelty; "wild children" raised outside human society; the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy, phrenology, and mesmerism; and the question of whether orang-outangs, apes, monkeys, baboons, etc. are capable of language.

If you like the readings on the *Haitian Revolution*, you might try to design your own constitution, or write your own speech, or pen your own tract on a political issue raised. Adventurous students can take on other political upheavals from the epoch.

If you like the *Encyclopédie*, you might peruse the *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (a contemporary scholarly work which [you can read online](#) or consult in the reference area of Knight Library at B802.E53 2002). Locate a subject that interests you, research it further using the bibliographies provided, and compose a short essay on it. The key here would be to reinterpret the findings of modern scholarship in a style more appropriate to the Enlightenment.

For further help in generating research materials, take a look at the bibliographies and footnotes in the course readings: they're in most cases excellent guides to the voluminous literature on the Enlightenment. Also consult the list of [research aids](#) posted on my website.

You are not expected to do exhaustive research but instead rummage around purposefully until you find an accurate, relevant book or article to fire your imagination and give you the factual and interpretive basis on which to compose your prose account. My

expectation is that you will follow Mercier *et al.* in matters of form and style, and your own research in matters of substance and interpretation.

Along the way, you should keep a research journal recording your thought process as you make trips to the library and set about the composition process. Idle hunches, questions, dead ends, books consulted but not checked out – all the residue of the detective process, in short – are just as relevant to the journal as the research material that does subsequently bear fruit.

You should clean up and condense this journal, rendering it a 3-4 page narrative of your research and the logic behind it, and turn it in with the imitation exercise proper.

**The whole package should be about 10-12 pages long: about 6-8 pages for the imitation exercise itself, and about 3-4 pages for your research narrative.**