

GOV 355M  
FOUNDATIONS OF CONSERVATISM AND RADICALISM:  
MONTESQUIEU AND ROUSSEAU  
The University of Texas at Austin

**Instructor:** Professor Gilmore

**Form:** In person

**Classes:** Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30-11:00 a.m. in CBA 4.330

**Office Hours:** Tuesday, 12:15 – 3:15 p.m.

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**Office:** Mezes Hall, 3.146

**Prerequisite:** GOV314E or CTI302, or faculty approval (ask me after class).

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Enlightenment took many forms in many places, but to speak of the thing itself is to speak of eighteenth-century France. There the hopes of a new world, a better world, a brighter world, free from ignorance and barbarism, a scientific age, even a perfect human order, a perpetual peace, flourished, and France's boughs reached so high that its culture not only touched but dominated the rest of Europe.

In the twenty-six years from 1789 to 1815 the French Revolution then executed those hopes on the grandest scale, with all the glory and all the infamy that that could mean. The ideas behind the Revolution remain with us today because we remain the Enlightenment's children.

The purpose of this class is to study two of the French Enlightenment's four greatest thinkers. We study these two, study Montesquieu and Rousseau, because they are the most complex. They climbed higher than all other eighteenth-century French thinkers, and in doing so they found doubts and dangers that the others either ignored or refused. They express Enlightenment thought perfectly, and for that reason they critique it. We are at least as interested in Montesquieu's and Rousseau's doubts as we are in their perfect expressions.

The theme we will use to frame our discussions is conservatism and radicalism. What are the conservative and the radical currents in each author? How do those currents mix? How do they play out today? Could our own conservatives be more radical than they wish to admit? And our radicals—could they be more traditional or conventional than they believe? To think with Montesquieu and Rousseau is to think in paradoxes. To think this way may not please everyone, but perhaps to think well never does.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

The translations listed are the translations that each student is expected to have and to use both in class and on all assignments. You must have the assigned text, but you can use older editions. Additional readings may be provided online via Canvas. All texts listed below will be available at the University Bookstore, but they can be purchased elsewhere.

- Montesquieu. 1973. *Persian Letters*. Trans. C.J. Betts. New York: Penguin.
- Montesquieu. 1989. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Trans. and ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1992. *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Trans. Charles E. Butterworth. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1997. *The Discourses and other early political writings*. Trans. and ed. Victor Gourevitch. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1997. *The Social Contract and other later political writings*. Trans. and ed. Victor Gourevitch. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## OPTIONAL TEXTS

You and I are not Margaret Atwood. Since we are not Margaret Atwood, we can improve our writing (as Atwood herself has done every day for sixty years). To improve your writing, you need teachers who know how to write well. Luckily, good writers like writing books.

Cook, Claire. 2003. *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.  
Cook will teach you how to slice the fat off of your essays. More technical than the others; best read after them.

Garner, Bryan. 2013. *Garner on Language and Writing*. Chicago: American Bar Association.  
Especially handy for those of you interested in law school; chapters one and five, however, will appeal to everyone.

Garner, Bryan. 2016. *Garner's Modern American Usage*. New York: Oxford University Press.  
The modern author's usage bible, written by a genius. Also available in App form.

Norris, Mary. 2015. *Between You and Me: Confessions of a Comma Queen*. New York: W.W. Norton. Light, informal, and often hilarious. Just what you'd expect from a copy editor at the *New Yorker*, right?

Trimble, John. 1975. *Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*. Englewood: Prentice-Hall. Trimble is Garner's BFF here in Austin and a man who took teaching as a vocation; aristocratic and witty.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Read well; write well; think freely.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Grade:**

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Participation                   | 30% |
| Midterm Paper (1500-2100 words) | 30% |
| Final Paper (2100-2750 words)   | 40% |

**Due Dates:**

1<sup>st</sup> Essay due: October 5  
2<sup>nd</sup> Essay due: December 5

## COURSE GUIDELINES

**Participation:** There are three ways to participate and three qualifications.

Modes:

1. ***In-class participation.*** If you show up every week and participate at least once each class, you will secure a B-/B for your participation. Speak well, question honestly, meet the text as you should, hand-to-hand, and you'll go higher; miss some classes, or don't speak up, or maltreat your fellow students, and you'll go lower. Both how often and how well you participate matter.
2. ***Office hours.*** If speaking in class isn't your style, you can still fully participate by asking me questions in office hours. I usually give undergraduates priority, so be ready to elbow any proud graduate students you encounter.
3. ***Reflection emails.*** If you send me a thoughtful reflection email each week, I will count that as participating. This reflection must be on the readings, and it must engage the text. It doesn't need to be long: two to three paragraphs suffice. Three additional notes: (1) The highest your participation grade can be on reflection emails *alone* is a 93. I reserve those last 7 points for those who participate directly and best; (2) Getting a 93 on reflection emails is not guaranteed just because you send me something every week—what you say matters; (3) While I will read them all, I will not respond to these reflection emails other than to confirm that I've received them (see Nemesis Qualification below).

Qualifications:

1. ***The You've Been Paying Attention Qualification.*** If you ace your papers, I may decide to boost your participation grade to match your essays' average. I know some of you back-of-the-room assassins would prefer dental surgery to conversation, and I won't punish you for it when you've thought so much and so well about the texts.
2. ***The Nemesis Qualification.*** The more time I spend on electronic communication, the worse my life becomes. If you have questions about our readings during the semester, please come ask me them in class or in office hours. Two exceptions: (1) You can always email me about personal matters relevant to the class (ex. illness); (2) I will answer emails about essays after I've sent out the prompts.

3. ***The Esprit de Corps Qualification.*** If you try to bulldoze class discussion, you will not impress me. You will hurt your grade and the common good. We will succeed as a group, or we will not succeed. That said, you can trust me to tell you if you're doing this. Participate regularly, but do not try to be the only participant.

**Papers:** This is a writing-intensive class.

1. For each paper, I will send out a prompt, and you will write an answer to that prompt. I will grade you based on how well you answer the prompt—both the substance of your argument and how you say it, though the latter matters more for those in the *A* range than for those in the *C* range.
2. Papers must be submitted with the word count at the top of the first page.
3. All papers must use Chicago citation style. Use this link (<https://guides.lib.utexas.edu/c.php?g=539686&p=3694907>), then click “Chicago Manual of Style Online,” then “The Chicago Manual of Style Contents,” then section III, part 14, “Notes and Bibliography.” Your footnotes do not count toward the word count on your papers.
4. Late papers will suffer a three-point penalty for each day they are late. A paper that is two days late will be penalized six points; a paper that is three days late will be penalized nine points, etc. The maximum late penalty is 15%. Papers will no longer be accepted 10 days after the due date. This applies to all handed-in assignments.
5. Papers above or below the word limit will suffer a three-point penalty for each 100 words they go over or under.
6. No extensions will be offered without a physician’s certificate or demonstration of extenuating circumstances except in cases of religious observances.
7. ***Plagiarism is anathema. Read the University of Texas at Austin’s policy on plagiarism, summarized by the history department here: <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/history/about/academic-integrity.php>. When you submit your work, you agree that you are submitting work that belongs only to you Submitting another’s work, in any form, and you risk failure, suspension, and expulsion (and, yes, an A.I. system counts as an “other”). If you have any questions about plagiarism, please ask me by email or in person at any time.***
8. Be sure to keep both an extra hard copy and a spare electronic copy of your work in case your submission is lost.
9. Since this is a seminar class, you may consult outside sources when writing your papers, but you do so at your own risk and for the moment I do not recommend it. You are responsible for your authorities’ errors if you rely on them. For now you should meet these texts as their authors intended them to be met: alone, with only your wits to defend you.

**Writing Resources on Campus:** What’s more fun than learning about editing from a book? Learning about editing in person. I encourage you to find information about the university’s writing center at <https://uwc.utexas.edu/>. Yes, some of the tutors there may disappoint, but it’s worth the risk: get a good one, it might change your life.

**The University of Texas Accommodations:** Students with disabilities may request academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities. I'm happy to work with them.

**Recordings:** Recording lectures without permission will result in a 10% penalty on the final grade; if you have a learning disability (hearing difficulties, vision deficiencies, injuries that prevent you from taking notes, mental health crisis, etc.), please see the above statement on accommodations.

## COURSE OUTLINE

*Note: I will adjust the readings as we go; I'll let you know by email when I do.*

### Part I: Persian Letters

- 1.) August 27—Course introduction; Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Dedicatory and *Letters* 1-3
- 2.) August 29—Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Letters 4-26, 29-31, 34-35, 37-9<sup>1</sup>
- 3.) September 1—Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Letters 40-3, 46-7, 53, 55, 59-60, 62-7 69-71
- 4.) September 3—Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, Letters 75, 79-80, 89-90, 92, 96, 102-3, 117, 122, 141, 147-161

### Part II: Spirit of the Laws

- 5.) September 8—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Author's Note, Preface, Book I
- 6.) September 10—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Books II-IV
- 7.) September 15—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Books V-VI
- 8.) September 17—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Books VII-VIII
- 9.) September 22—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Book X.3-4, 13-4; Book XI **First Essay Assigned**
- 10.) September 24—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Books XII, XIV
- 11.) September 29—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Books XVIII (selections), XIX
- 12.) September 31—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Books XX-XXI
- 13.) October 5—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Books XXIV-XXV **First essay due**

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<sup>1</sup> Focus on Letters 4-26. If we make it to 29-31, 34-6, and 37-9, great, but if not I will send out my complete notes on them after class.

14.) October 7—Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Books XXVI, XXIX

### **Part III: Rousseau's Critique**

15.) October 12—Rousseau, *Discourse on Arts and Sciences*, Frontispiece, Epigraph, Preface, Discourse, Part I

16.) October 14—Rousseau, *Discourse on Arts and Sciences*, Part II

17.) October 19—Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, Epigraph, Epistle Dedicatory, Preface, Exordium

18.) October 21—Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, Part I

19.) October 26—Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, Part II (first)

20.) October 28—Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, Part II (second)

### **Part IV: Freedom in Crisis**

21.) November 3—Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Epigraph, Notice, Book I, Chapters 1-6

22.) November 5—Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book I, Chapters 7-9; Book II, Chapters 1-5

23.) November 12—Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book II, 6-12; Book III, Chapter 1

24.) November 14—Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book III, Chapters 2-14 Final essay assigned

25.) November 19—Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book III, Chapters 15-18; Book IV, Chapters 1-3, 5-8

26.) November 21—Rousseau, *Reveries*, Walk 1 (all), Walk 2 (p.12-7), Walk 3 (p.27-35, 39-40).

27.) December 3—Rousseau, *Reveries*, Walk 5 (all), Walk 6 (all).

28.) December 5—No class, but final essay due.