

French Enlightenment Ideals under the Microscope

Instructor: Cynthia Laura Vialle-Giancotti

Pronouns: She, her, hers

Room:

Day and Time:

Office Hours: TBD

Course Description:

Have you ever heard the French slogan *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*? These three words, meaning respectively freedom, equality and fraternity, are today printed, engraved, carved on every French governmental building, school, university and public institution. While these words have been a great source of pride for the French people in the last two centuries, recent studies have shown how much ideals stemming in the French Enlightenment were built on the exclusion of women, the lower classes, foreigners, and slaves. In this class we will examine these ideals to investigate and interrogate their legacy in contemporary Western societies. To do so, we will read excerpts and articles from the *Encyclopédie*, the first French 18th-century encyclopedia, composed by 28 volumes and containing state-of-the-art (at the time) reflections on life, law, history, society, citizenship, etc.

Calendar

Week 1: Introduction to the Encyclopédie

Section 1 Introduction.

Reading and analysis in class of “Constance” and “Inconstance” art. By Denis Diderot (1713-1784)

Section 2 The *Encyclopédie* and its Project

Art. “Encyclopédie”, by Denis Diderot (1713-1784) (Selections)

Week 2: Les philosophes and their philosophy

Section 1 Art. “Philosophe”, by César Chesneau Du Marsais (1676-1756)

Art. “Éclectisme”, by Denis Diderot (1713-1784) (Selections)

Section 2 Art. “Raison”, unattributed

In-Class Research&Presentation: At home: conduct a mini research on one of the following *Encyclopédistes*: *Diderot*, *Voltaire*; *Chevalier de Jaucourt*; *Du Marsais*; *D’Alembert*. In class you’ll have ten minutes to prepare, with the other students who picked the same author as you, a quick joint presentation of these authors’s lives.

Week 3: Civic Sentiment in the Enlightenment

Section 1 Art. “Citoyen”, by Denis Diderot (1713-1784)

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Art. "Cité", by Denis Diderot (1713-1784)

Art. "Le Peuple", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779) (Selections)

In-Class Research: you'll be divided in groups and will have to find modern definitions in French and in English of the concepts "Citizen" and "People", any source (dictionaries, encyclopedia, wikipedia) is equally worthwhile exploring. We'll discuss and compare together your findings!

Section 2 Art. "Nation", unattributed

Ernest Renan (1823-1892), "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation ?" (1882) (Selections)

In-Class Discussion: Compare the idea of Nation from the 18th century and the idea of nation as presented by Renan. What changes? Why do you think that is the case? What kind of "nation" do we believe in today?

Week 4: Morality in the Enlightenment

Section 1 Art. "Vertu", by Jean-Edmé Romilly (1739-1779), Denis Diderot (1713-1784) (uncertain attribution), Joseph de Ségur (1737-1767) (Selections)

Art. "Le Sage", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779) (Selections)

Section 2 Art. "Égoïsme", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Dissimulation", by Jean-Henri-Samuel Formey (1711-1797)

In-Class Debate: At home, based on this week's readings, define what kind of moral values were upheld in the Enlightenment. Think of what kind of moral values modern society (in your culture) considers as primary. Pick the Enlightenment's side or the Modern Perspective. In class you'll be divided into two groups. You'll have about ten minutes to prepare your arguments to defend why certain values matter more and why and then we'll start the debate, in French of course!

Week 5: Forms of Tolerance

Section 1 Art. "Tolérance", by Jean-Edmé Romilly (1739-1779)

Art. "Zèle", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779) (Selections)

Section 2 Art. "Étranger", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Liberté de Conscience", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Week 6: Between Natural and Civil Right(s)

Section 1 Art. "État de Nature", by Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779) (Selections)

In-Class Research&Presentation: At home: prepare a mini research on one of the following themes: *Natural Law - Natural Rights - State of Nature - Social Contract*. In class you'll have ten minutes to prepare, with the other students who picked the same themes as you, a quick joint presentation.

Section 2 Pick two from the following articles and summarize their ideas. We'll have a debate around which law should have // had // has priority and why.

Art. "Loi", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Loi Naturelle", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Loi Divine", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Loi Politique", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Loi Civile", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Loi Criminelle", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Week 7: Comparing Declarations and their 'Universal' Rights

Section 1 For this section, choose to read the French texts or the Anglo-American ones. In class you'll present a summary of the ideas, ideals, ideologies presented in each of them. We'll try to contextualize and understand the political context and the underlying reasons justifying their specific stance.

French:

Art. "Despotisme", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Oppression" by Denis Diderot (1713-1784)

Art. "Tyran", unattributed

Art. "Révolte", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Révolution", unattributed

Anglo-American:

Thomas Paine (1737-1809), *Common Sense* (Selections) (1776)

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), "The Declaration of Independence" (Jefferson's draft) (1776),

Section 2 At home: read and compare the preamble and the first ten articles* of the "Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776), "La Déclaration des droits de l'homme" (1786) and the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (1948). Consider which ideals they appear to be upholding first and foremost and identify the differences. Consider the approach Rights VS Law explored in week 6 to guide your reading. *Feel free to read more articles if you have enough time.

Week 8: Enemies, Wars and Empires

Section 1 Selections from the following articles:

Art. "Conquête", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Guerre", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Research&Presentation: At home: make a mini research on one of the following themes: *Colonialism - Post-Colonialism - Imperialism - Orientalism*. Be mindful: these terms are wide on purpose to let you find your own angle of research. In class we'll discuss together your findings.

Section 2 Art. "Ennemi", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Dégât", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779) & Jean D'Alembert (1717-1789)

Week 9: Égalité but for whom?

Section 1 Art. "Égalité Naturelle", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Art. "Femme", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Optional articles to read if time, that will be discussed in class:

Art. "Adultère" by Denis Diderot (1713-1784) & Abbé Claude Yvon (1714-1791)

Art. "Viol", unattributed

In-Class Discussion: For this discussion we will be considering of course what the articles say, but also what they don't say. Think about all of the elements that you would think/expect to find in the articles and that are not there.

Section 2 Selections from the art:

Art. "Esclave", by Antoine Gaspard Boucher d'Argis (1708-1791)

Art. "Esclavage", by Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779)

Selections from Jefferson's Notes on Slavery in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785)

In-Class Discussion: In class we'll work on comparing different ideas of slavery in these two different cultures. Consider, while you are reading, that America was a colony itself, under the yoke of England, and that slavery was a common and visible experience. While for a French author, slavery would have been a “peripheral” concern, something happening abroad, in lands exotic and foreign that he may or may not have seen with his own eyes. Think about how these two different perspectives may have influenced their view on the matter.

Week 10: Review, Final Discussions and Articles Selection

Section 1 Final Review and discussion of the main concepts, articles. We'll go through your personal comments and ideas of the readings and the *Encyclopédie* in general.

Section 2 Present your choice of articles to your classmates and be prepared to explain their content, their significance and the reasons underlying your selection.

Suggested introductory readings:

Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment: And Why It Still Matters* (2012)

Ritchie Robertson, *The Enlightenment: the Pursuit of Happiness (1680-1790)* (2020)

Mathilde Bombart, ed., *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (2008)

Course Objectives and Learning Goals

By the end of this course, you will:

Language

- Strengthen your ability to express yourself orally in French;
- Gain some familiarity with academic reading and writing in French;
- Become familiar with discussions in an academic setting in French (formulating and defending one's opinion, hypothesizing, use of the passive and the subjunctive);
- Develop knowledge and make active use of historical, literary, juridical vocabulary in French;

Literary and cultural analysis

- Learn to research a social and historical phenomenon, using a variety of resources from different fields;
- Learn to develop and present your interpretations both of fiction and social change, both orally and in writing;

Evaluation

5 Units

- Class Participation (40% of the Grade)
- Oral Presentation (10% of the Grade)
- Written Assignments (30% of the Grade), in French.

Details on the Evaluation Format

1. Class Participation: reading the assigned materials, participating actively in the class discussions; in the debates, in the research and presentations (both at home and in class). You'll receive weekly feedback on your participation throughout the quarter.

2. Oral Presentation: 10min max presentation on an assigned topic, decided together with the instructor, to kick off class discussion. Presentation Suggestions:

- Paraphrase the text (summarize it and describe its logical sequence/narrative structure). Or present an overview of the issue at hand, when the presentation is about background information.
- Present the two or three passages you find most relevant and analyze them. If you are not presenting readings on the syllabus, bring mini excerpts from relevant written material.
- Suggest insightful questions for our class discussion.
- Find another article from the *Encyclopédie* that you think relevant to the ones analysed in class that day and build connections between your article of choice and the readings.

3. Written Assignments (3x):

Assignment 1, due on Sunday 12pm of week 3

- Pick one of the articles assigned thus far and write a 400-words comment in French. You can offer a commentary on the article and the ideas it promotes; you can build a comparison with your own personal ideas and/or experience on the topic; you can explore similarities/differences with modern law, moral values, etc.
- Be mindful of your French expression: remember to verify *accords* btw subject, verb, adjective; make sure that you are using the correct verb tense; use the dictionary to verify the use in a sentence of a specific word you are not familiar with; use the dictionary of collocations if you don't know how to build clusters of words.

Assignment 2, due on Sunday 12pm of week 6

- Pick one of the articles assigned thus far and write a 400-words comment in French. You can offer a commentary on the article and the ideas it promotes; you can build a comparison with your own personal ideas and/or experience on the topic; you can explore similarities/differences with modern law, moral values, etc.
- Be mindful of your French expression: remember to verify *accords* btw subject, verb, adjective; make sure that you are using the correct verb tense; use the dictionary to verify the use in a sentence of a specific word you are not familiar with; use the dictionary of collocations if you don't know how to build clusters of words.

Assignment 3, due on Sunday 12pm of week 10

1. You'll look for 5 articles of your choice from the Encyclopédie. You can easily do so by putting keywords in French in ARTFL and see what you find. For instance, if you want to find ideas about tolerance you can input '*tolérance*' and ARTFL will show you all the articles containing that key-word. Not all of the articles will be relevant, but you may stumble upon some interesting findings.

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2. You'll present the articles (10min max) during the last week of the quarter to your classmates and explain the reasons underlying your choice. Be prepared to answer questions and address reservations.
3. The last part of the assignment is a written analysis of these five articles. You'll analyse, dissect, question, agree with the articles using the socio-historical and linguistic tools learnt in class. The length of the paper may vary, but ideally it would be between 5-10 pages.

Affordability, Sensibility and Inclusion

All of the *Encyclopédie* articles are available on ARTFL at this link: <https://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>. I strongly recommend you familiarise yourself with this website and conduct word, concept, author researches on your own throughout the quarter. This will help you, not only because you will discover unsuspected gems of knowledge hidden behind purposefully unassuming titles [the *Encyclopédistes* were constantly staving off censorship], but also because you will be ready for the final assignment. Thus, by the end of the quarter you will have a clearer idea of the material you would like to use. The rest of the papers, excerpts and articles will be available on Canvas.

I will not warn students about particular topics, because sensitivity to different topics varies from person to person, and because topics may arise unexpectedly in class discussion. Given the sensitive and challenging nature of some of the material discussed in class, it is imperative that there be an atmosphere of trust and safety in the classroom. We will work on fostering an environment in which everyone feels safe to speak and is open to listening to what the other has to say.