The Enlightenment Invention of the Modern Self
Part I
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Leo Damrosch was born in the Philippines, where his parents were missionaries. He received a B.A. from Yale in 1963; an M.A. from Cambridge University, where he was a Marshall Scholar, in 1966; and a Ph.D. from Princeton in 1968. He has taught at the University of Virginia, from 1968 to 1983; at the University of Maryland in College Park, until 1989; and since 1989, at Harvard, where for a five-year term, he was chairman of the Department of English. In 2001, he was named a Harvard College Professor in recognition of distinguished teaching. Professor Damrosch has held National Endowment for the Humanities and Guggenheim research fellowships and, on four occasions, has directed National Endowment for the Humanities summer seminars for college teachers. His books include *Samuel Johnson and the Tragic Sense*, *The Uses of Johnson’s Criticism*, *Symbol and Truth in Blake’s Myth*, *God’s Plot and Man’s Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding*, *The Imaginative World of Alexander Pope*, *Fictions of Reality in the Age of Hume and Johnson*, and *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus: James Nayler and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit*. Professor Damrosch lives in Newton, Massachusetts, with his wife, Joyce Van Dyke, and their two sons.
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The Enlightenment Invention of the Modern Self

Scope:

This course studies a wide range of works, from the 1670s to the 1790s, by writers in France and Britain who struggled to understand the paradoxes of the self at a time when traditional religious and philosophical formulas were breaking down and who formulated fundamental questions in ways that have remained important and troubling ever since. The philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of “the senses of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature which are at home in the modern West.” Yet these convictions coexist with a very different set of assumptions according to which the self is socially conditioned and enjoys neither individuality nor freedom, except as consoling illusions. All modern thinkers about psychology and society have had to recognize the tension between these two modes of thinking. On the one hand, we feel that we have a strong intuition of our individuality and self-sufficiency; on the other hand, we have an equally strong intuition that the self is largely shaped by exterior forces. Whenever we address these issues, either in our personal reflections or in the framework of an intellectual discipline, such as philosophy, psychology, or sociology, we are using concepts and terms that we have inherited from the 18th-century Enlightenment.

The first five lectures introduce the Enlightenment as a cultural movement and explore some earlier interpretations of psychological experience that prevailed at the end of the 17th century, focusing on the religious writings of Bunyan and Pascal, the philosophy of Descartes, and the aristocratic ethos embodied in the aphorisms of La Rochefoucauld and the pioneering novel La Princesse de Clèves by Mme de Lafayette.

The sixth and seventh lectures present the empiricist philosophy, originating in Britain, that became the default form of explanation in the 18th century. Special attention is given to some important questions that this new philosophy tended to minimize and that the writers we will study had to find new ways to address. The eighth lecture looks at Voltaire’s mordant satire Candide to illustrate the Enlightenment’s emphasis on social and political issues and its tendency to dismiss psychological analysis as essentially irrelevant. The ninth lecture seeks to show that even the most successful writers of biography—Voltaire, Gibbon, and Johnson—were still working with intellectual tools that were old-fashioned and, in many ways, inadequate, indicating the increasingly apparent need for new kinds of explanation to be developed.

The tenth and eleventh lectures discuss a remarkably fresh and original piece of writing, a diary kept by James Boswell when he was in his early 20s and unpublished until the 20th century, that reflects a real-life struggle to resolve issues that thinkers were just beginning to formulate in modern terms. The next seven lectures turn to a fascinating odd couple, close friends for many years but eventually enemies, Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Diderot, a witty conversationalist and energetic editor of the central propaganda weapon of the Enlightenment, the multivolume Encyclopedia, expressed a highly skeptical view of psychological self-understanding in his unpublished experimental works, the dialogues Rameau’s Nephew and D’Alembert’s Dream, and the parodic anti-novel Jacques the Fatalist. Rousseau, on the other hand, advanced a theory that human beings once enjoyed a condition of psychic wholeness in a precivilized state of nature and argued that it ought to be possible to undo some of the damage society causes in individuals and achieve a more authentic existence. He put forward this theory in his groundbreaking Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, drew political implications from it in the immensely influential Social Contract, and literally invented modern autobiography in his Confessions. These great works will be studied as a group to bring out their profound interconnectedness.

Lectures Nineteen through Twenty-Two explore the state of ideas as the 18th century neared its close. The autobiography of Benjamin Franklin presents a coherent portrait of a harmonious and integrated individual who strives to make his public self and private self a seamless whole, and the psychological and economic theories of Adam Smith give a theoretical basis for this view of life. Very differently, Laclos’s great novel Les Liaisons Dangereuses exposes the potentially limitless ambiguity of any attempt to understand what really motivates human beings and leaves its readers in a disturbing ethical limbo.

The final two lectures look forward to the Romantic period, in which the achievement of the Enlightenment would be both extended and criticized, focusing on William Blake’s superbly imaginative pictures and poems that brilliantly reconceive the central issues of the course.

The guiding premise of the course is that ideas are best understood in the context of particular works, where they gain depth and life from the experience of gifted individuals. Conveniently available paperback editions of the
principal texts are recommended, and a central purpose of the course is to inspire people to read these texts, either concurrently as they are discussed in the lectures or afterward in the light of the course as a whole. Above all, it is important to honor the uniqueness of great works of imagination, whether they take the form of philosophy, of autobiography, or of fiction. If Newton had never lived, Leibniz would still have invented the calculus; if Rousseau and Blake had never lived, no one else could conceivably have written *The Confessions* or *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. 
Lecture One
Changing Ideas of the Self

Scope: This lecture presents an overview of the traditional belief system whose coherent picture of psychological life began to break down during the Renaissance and Reformation (roughly, the period from 1500 to 1700). This system gave way, by the early 18th century, to the philosophy of empiricism, the central assumptions of which are described. The Enlightenment stressed practical improvement rather than theoretical speculation; developed models of the self that were suited to a growing individualism; and found value in emotion, as well as in reason, but ignored much that had been deservedly important in the older worldview.

Outline
I. Why study Enlightenment ideas about the self?
   A. The 18th century was the time when modern ideas about the self began to be imagined and worked out.
   B. Thinking about the self had tended to fall into two major groupings.
      1. One way of thinking affirmed an inner core of authentic selfhood and sought to gain access to that true self and be faithful to it.
      2. The other group claimed that the self is socially conditioned; it is nothing more than a series of roles we learn to play.
      3. All modern thinkers about psychology and society have had to recognize the tension between these two modes of thinking.
   C. Today, we are familiar with highly developed disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, that analyze the self in systematic ways.
      1. In the 18th century, the kinds of explanations that are current today had not yet been invented; what was needed was to ask new questions.
      2. The most fruitful investigations were not academic at all but narratives about human experience, particularly autobiographies and novels, whose influence on our self-understanding has been enormous.

II. This course has a historical story line that can be broken down into three parts.
   A. Traditional religious accounts of experience gradually weakened and became relatively marginalized in the culture as a whole.
   B. By the early 18th century, the newly dominant mode of explanation was the philosophy of empiricism.
      1. Empiricism held that all knowledge comes from sense experience, not from intuition or divine revelation.
      2. It treated scientific experiment and objective reasoning as the norm for understanding everything in the world, including our selves.
      3. It produced a pragmatic, behaviorist, socially oriented account of human behavior that ignored important aspects of experience that religious doctrine had taken seriously.
   C. Toward the end of the 18th century, the empiricist model gave way to a new subjectivism (associated with the movement known as Romanticism) that gave greater emphasis to complexities and conflict in psychological experience.
   D. Cultural development is never simple; therefore, it would be wrong to assume that the religious model was simply replaced by the empiricist one.

III. What was the Enlightenment?
   A. The Enlightenment was an intellectual and cultural movement centered in Paris that became fully self-conscious around 1750 and promoted itself as the Enlightenment (in French, les lumières), implying that light should be cast on dark places.
      1. It is sometimes, but misleadingly, called the Age of Reason, which is more appropriate for the ambitious philosophical systems of the 17th century.
      2. The Enlightenment was pragmatic, not theoretical; it treated received ideas with skepticism and aimed to free the human race from inherited dogmas to remake the world in practical ways.
3. In social and political life, it represented a potential challenge to the status quo, calling into question
the authority of the church and of aristocrats and kings.
4. Because the Enlightenment was a movement that gradually gained in strength and self-awareness, it
cannot be dated precisely, though the publication, around 1750, of the *Encyclopedia of the Sciences,
Arts, and Trades* can be viewed as the date that the movement really became established.

B. In the traditional system, knowledge had been treated as potentially dangerous, stemming from the primal
sin when Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise for eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and
evil. Enlightenment writers took as their slogan the phrase *sapere aude*, “dare to know,” and mounted a
powerful propaganda campaign in favor of free thought.

C. The Enlightenment was a program for technological and social change based on a new idea of thought, and
it implied a new role for the independent individual, thinking for himself, free from authoritarian beliefs.

IV. Historians tell us that this changing view of the self came about in response to major cultural developments in
the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

A. Inherited status once encouraged people to feel secure about who they were.
1. In the Middle Ages, it was normal to spend one’s entire life in the same locality, surrounded by an
extended family that provided a context of social belonging, and working at a traditional trade
inherited from one’s forebears. During the transitional period known as the Renaissance, social
mobility allowed increasing numbers to change their status and redefine who they were.
2. Until the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, everyone was automatically born into the Roman
Catholic church; thereafter, multiple choices among sects were available, and skeptical agnosticism
became a possible alternative to orthodox belief.

B. The traditional belief system provided a comprehensive account of the self.
1. The psyche was hierarchically structured, with reason on top, the passions below, and the will as the
executive power that carried out reason’s commands.
2. The psychic life of the individual was governed by the relationship among the four physiological
fluids known as “humors,” corresponding to the four elements of which the entire universe was
composed. These needed to be in balance, or tempered (thus: “temperament”).
3. Mind and body were, thus, inseparably joined, and any mental imbalance was explained as a direct
expression of bodily disorder.
4. Christianity offered a new and powerful explanation: the story of Original Sin. Because of Adam and
Eve’s primal disobedience, the entire human race is in bondage to Satan, which explains why
individuals are out of balance.

C. The Enlightenment broke with the old psychology to develop new and dynamic accounts of psychic life.
1. The autonomy of the individual was increasingly stressed, rather than conformity to established norms.
2. A newly positive role was seen in instinctual impulses prompted by “nature,” and strong passions,
instead of being symptoms of unbalanced bodily humors, came to be seen as expressions of positive
energy.

D. Two very different models of the self competed in Enlightenment thought.
1. One model, exemplified in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, held that each of us has a core of authenticity, a
true self to which we must be faithful.
2. The other model, exemplified in David Hume, held that the self is only a convenient fiction and that
we are really nothing more than the ever-changing, socially determined roles that we play.

E. Some 17th-century texts by John Donne and William Shakespeare illustrate the cracks that were appearing
in the old system of explanation and look forward to new questions that the Enlightenment would pursue.

Suggested Reading:
Questions to Consider:
1. To what extent have religious explanations been successful in accommodating themselves to the challenge offered by the Enlightenment?
2. Does the medieval theory of bodily humors make a kind of sense in light of recent research into the relationship between mind and body?
Lecture Two

17th-Century Religious Versions of the Self

Scope: This lecture describes the benchmark from which modern thinking about the self evolved: the religious system that had prevailed unchallenged for more than a millennium. Religious belief gave a reassuring sense of belonging in a providential universe, and feelings of conflictedness and guilt were explained by the doctrine of Original Sin and the dualism of flesh and spirit. This lecture examines two great religious writers, the English Protestant John Bunyan and the French Catholic Blaise Pascal, whose writings showed deep psychological insight but also revealed painful tensions at the heart of the religious system. By contrast, Enlightenment thinkers would insist on the positive value of this world, would make pride a virtue rather than a sin, and would seek fulfillment in social interaction, not in self-disciplining solitude.

Outline

I. The traditional religious picture of the self was the benchmark from which later thinking developed.
   A. Until well into the 17th century, philosophy and psychology were confined in a religious framework, which gives us the benchmark from which later thinking developed.
   B. Many religious groups taught a comforting doctrine, and with the growth of secularization, many individuals tended to compartmentalize religion, but the more troubled temperaments are the most interesting for this course.

II. We will first consider the Augustinian and Calvinist contribution to psychology.
   A. The set of attitudes known as Augustinian (deriving from the 5th-century thinker Saint Augustine) stressed the dualism of spirit and flesh and the helplessness of humans to escape eternal punishment without the free gift of God’s grace.
   B. In its Catholic form, this was known in France as Jansenism and, in its Protestant form, as Calvinism.
      1. Calvinism held that Christ saved only a tiny minority, known as “the elect,” from the penalty of Original Sin; the majority were damned before they were born (predestination).
      2. This theology was attractive to persons who felt themselves to be conflicted or obsessive, and their experience and writings had a major influence on later psychological thought.

III. We can see how this psychology of self-division works by considering the example of John Bunyan.
   A. Bunyan was a self-educated tinker who got his ideas from the Bible, not from theology. He became an eloquent preacher during the period of Puritan rule, and after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, he spent many years in jail because he refused to stop preaching.
   B. His two greatest books adapt the Augustinian model to spiritual experience as he knew it.
      1. *The Pilgrim’s Progress* traces the allegorical journey of an archetypal Christian through dangers and temptations. It teaches a radical individualism in which the believer must pull away from everything in this world, even his own family, and it treats unwanted aspects of the self as temptations attacking from without.
      2. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography, is a much less optimistic record of an endless cycle of hope and self-doubt, committing itself in the end to a desperate leap of faith.
   C. As an illustration by William Blake suggests, Bunyan was denying his own deepest impulses by calling them threats from outside, and the result was an intensification of the very suffering his faith was meant to cure.

IV. Blaise Pascal serves as another example of an individual thinking and living inside the Augustinian tradition.
   A. Pascal was a scientist and a religious thinker in the Jansenist wing of French Catholicism, which emphasized Augustinian doctrine.
   B. The *Pensées*, Pascal’s “thoughts” on Christianity, were intended as a challenge to the competitive, prestige-obsessed world of the French court.
1. He argued that people use social interaction as an escape from their own emptiness and unhappiness and refuse to acknowledge the fundamental corruption of human nature that resulted from Original Sin.
2. In Pascal’s view the self is hateful, and Christianity is the one true religion because it teaches us to hate ourselves.
3. Pascal offers an eloquent explanation for human conflictedness, but like Bunyan, he demands a leap of faith toward a God who seems so far away that it is hard to reach him; the modern universe is infinite and silent.

V. The Enlightenment would strive to reverse all of these attitudes, urging us to value this world for its own sake, to feel positive self-esteem, and to recognize social interaction as the healthiest form of living.

Suggested Reading:
John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.
———, The Pilgrim's Progress.
H. J. Broome, Pascal.
Leo Damrosch, God’s Plot and Man’s Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding.
Christopher Hill, A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is The Pilgrim’s Progress an early version of the novel, or does Bunyan’s mode of allegorical narrative make Christian a type rather than a person?
2. Does Pascal’s vision of man’s aloneness in a mysterious universe look forward to 20th-century existentialism?
Lecture Three
17th-Century Secular Versions of the Self

Scope: This lecture begins by considering the implications of René Descartes’s rationalism, with its move from philosophy as wisdom to philosophy as epistemology (“the problem of knowledge”) and its method of systematic doubt that produces the famous “I think, therefore I am.” The lecture then turns to the empiricism of the British political theorist Thomas Hobbes, who held that all knowledge is derived from sense experience and defined a selfish desire for power as the fundamental source of all human behavior. The problem for Enlightenment thinkers would be to reconfigure empiricism in such a way as to avoid the grimmer aspects of Hobbes’s thought, defining competition as constructive and sociability as natural for human beings. The lecture concludes with some examples of biography that expose limitations in 17th-century psychological interpretation.

Outline

I. We begin by considering the French rationalist tradition from which 18th-century empiricism separated itself.
   A. The mathematician-philosopher René Descartes exemplifies the move from philosophy as wisdom (philosophia) to epistemology (“the problem of knowledge”).
      1. Descartes is working with the assumptions of the “Age of Reason”: Reason (not faith) can give certainty, but the way to get there is through systematic doubt.
      2. In the Discourse on Method, he argues that the one thing we know for certain is that each of us is res cogitans, “a thing that thinks,” and the bottom line is, therefore, the famous cogito ergo sum, “I think, therefore I am.”
      3. But we can’t know anything else for certain, even that the thinking self has a body; thus, the modern mind-body problem.
   B. Descartes’s philosophy is potentially secular, even if he himself didn’t think so, and extremely rational.

II. The philosophy that gradually replaced Cartesian rationalism was empiricism.
   A. The English political theorist Thomas Hobbes exemplifies the turn to empiricism.
      1. All knowledge is derived from sense experience and can only be provisional, based on demonstration that produces probabilities rather than certainty.
      2. All of existence is reducible to the single phenomenon of matter in motion (a radical materialism).
   B. Whereas the Cartesian self introspects in solitude, the Hobbesian self is a social agent.
      1. In Leviathan, Hobbes holds that all men are incurably selfish and that the precivilized state of nature was a “war of all against all.”
      2. Society and government—which are artificial, not natural—were instituted by a social contract to protect us from each other.
      3. The self, as Hobbes sees it, remains totally egotistical so that even compassion and laughter are self-centered; later empiricist thinkers would have to find a way to reconcile selfish individualism with social cooperation.

III. Two examples of biography provide insight into how people understood human life in the concrete rather than the abstract.
   A. John Aubrey collected biographical anecdotes, including many about his friend Hobbes.
      1. Aubrey relates memorable details about Hobbes that might almost be called novelistic.
      2. He lacks, however, any organizing concept to give depth to his picture of Hobbes, whose own writings suggest a deeper understanding of psychology but also a striking narrowness.
   B. The Earl of Halifax wrote a brilliantly concise “character” of King Charles II, whom he had served as a trusted advisor.
      1. Halifax describes the king from outside, showing how everyone in the court studied his face and speech for clues to his hidden intentions.
      2. All relationships, including sexual ones, are interpreted in terms of power.
IV. The challenge for later thought will be to join significant details with a larger concept of the self, and the novel would be the form in which this was best accomplished.

Suggested Reading:
John Cottingham, The Rationalists.
René Descartes, Discourse on Method and Related Writings, trans. Desmond M. Clarke.
Richard Tuck, Hobbes.
Bernard Williams, Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry.

Questions to Consider:
1. Has the experience of the 20th century given support to Hobbes’s grim view of human nature?
2. Should a biographer work from a considered view of human nature, or is Aubrey’s eclectic gathering of anecdotes likely to produce a fuller picture of an actual person?
Lecture Four
Lafayette, La Princesse de Clèves, I

Scope: This lecture begins by describing the shrewd but narrow worldview of the aristocratic court culture in France at the end of the 17th century, focusing on the penetrating aphorisms of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld. The lecture then introduces the pioneering novel La Princesse de Clèves by Mme. de Lafayette, which develops a similar view of life in narrative form. People are seen as fundamentally motivated by self-love, concerned at all times to confirm their power, and fearing to fall in love lest they succumb to the superior power of another person. Lafayette’s narrator often refuses to satisfy the reader’s desire for sufficient explanations, so that motives remain disconcertingly obscure to the reader, as well as to the characters themselves.

Outline

I. The Maxims of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld serve as a valuable guide to the ethos of the court of Louis XIV, where a climate of stability was established after a period of political unrest.
   A. The aristocrats who gathered at Versailles shared a culture of mondanité, or “worldliness,” emphasizing intelligence, taste, and social graces.
   B. There was a fad of composing aphoristic maxims that describe aspects of human nature in quasi-proverbial form.
      1. The Duc de La Rochefoucauld, a former soldier, compiled a book of Maxims, which are penetrating in their clarity but deliberately disconnected and fragmentary.
      2. La Rochefoucauld sees amour-propre, or “self-love,” as the key to all behavior, which means that we hide our true motives from ourselves; he even anticipates, in part, the concept of an unconscious.
      3. The Maxims are atemporal, describing what always happens, and they aim at universality, giving no sense of individual subjectivity.

II. La Princesse de Clèves, published anonymously by La Rochefoucauld’s friend Mme. de Lafayette, develops implications of the same view of life in the form of a novel.
   A. Unlike the Maxims, La Princesse de Clèves is a connected narrative, following its characters in temporal development.
   B. The story is set a hundred years in the past.
      1. This is partly to avoid identifying the characters with real people in the court of Louis XIV, where Mme. de Lafayette conducted a leading salon.
      2. It also locates the story in a time when the aristocracy still had real power and when a period of disastrous civil wars was about to begin.
   C. The story traces the emotional experience of a beautiful young woman, Mlle. de Chartres.
      1. Her mother arranges a marriage with M. de Clèves, who is desperately in love with her and who finds it deeply painful that she respects but doesn’t love him in return. (Because her husband holds the rank of prince she becomes a “princess.”)
      2. A glamorous nobleman, the Duc de Nemours, is smitten with her, but she steadfastly refuses to return his interest in spite of realizing that she does indeed want him.
      3. The princess is now the object of triangular desire on the part of both men, for if desire is defined by wanting what you don’t have, then her husband’s desire continues unabated as a direct result of her coolness toward him.
   D. The novel’s theme is the psychology of love.
      1. The driving motive for people in the court is the quest for power and prestige.
      2. Amatory conquests take the place of military ones, sex is always an expression of power, and desire is defined as wanting what one doesn’t have.
      3. Falling in love is perceived as like an illness and as entailing submission to the power of another person.
   E. The psychological analysis focuses on the problem of sincerity.
1. Our culture has increasingly aspired to an ideal of truth-telling authenticity, but most 17th-century writers took it for granted that we can never know the truth about our own motives.

2. Nonetheless, M. de Clèves begs his wife to tell him if she ever finds herself attracted to another man, and she agrees, mainly to forestall her own temptation to respond to Nemours.

3. But as La Rochefoucauld says, in jealousy there is more of self-love than love, and the attempt to be sincere only leads to worse suffering.

4. Meanwhile, Nemours, increasingly obsessed with the princess, searches anxiously for clues and hints of her concealed feelings toward him.

Suggested Reading:

Peter Brooks, *The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal* (especially the opening chapters).


W. G. Moore, *La Rochefoucauld: His Mind and Art*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is La Rochefoucauld’s picture of psychology convincing in its uncompromising clarity or excessively cynical in locating base motives for human behavior?

2. Are jealousy and desire for what one doesn’t have inseparable from the most convincing literary and cinematic depictions of love?
Lecture Five

La Princesse de Clèves, II

Scope: As La Princesse de Clèves moves forward, the characters feel increasingly trapped in a rigid type-psychology, torn between conflicting passions and condemned to predictable role-playing, even when they yearn for sincerity. But whereas tragic heroes and heroines of the time were driven to catastrophe by their conflicts, this novel’s heroine breaks free from fatalism by rejecting the values of the court and electing a religious retreat. The lecture concludes by suggesting ways in which La Princesse de Clèves, for all its greatness, is trapped in a worldview that would soon come to an end, unable to envision the possibility of companionate love, of sexual enjoyment that is not a power play, or an evolving personality as opposed to a static character.

Outline

I. The consequences of the pact of sincerity begin to unfold.
   A. When the princess confesses to her husband at their country estate that she is attracted to Nemours, he can’t believe that she won’t be unfaithful, and what is still worse, Nemours himself contrives to overhear this very conversation.
   B. Nemours tells a version of the story (without naming names) to a friend; when the story shows up as gossip, M. de Clèves and the princess each believe that the other must have betrayed his or her trust.
   C. After having tried so hard to rise above the usual betrayal and jealousy of their milieu, the characters now feel trapped in the dilemmas of all-too-conventional psychology.
      1. M. de Clèves is tormented by the odi et amo tension in which love and hate are inextricably joined.
      2. The princess had prided herself on being different from other women and is humiliated to think that she is acting just like anyone else in the grip of a destructive passion.

II. As the plot develops, the characters are placed under increasing pressure.
   A. The king is killed in a tournament, and while M. de Clèves is involved in court business, the princess goes again to her country estate.
      1. Nemours manages to spy on her there a second time; when he sees her gazing at his portrait and tying ribbons around a cane that used to belong to him, he knows at last how much she desires him.
      2. But voyeurism is self-destructive (as in the ancient myth of Actaeon), and now Nemours is trapped by his obsession, wasting his life trying to get a glimpse of the woman who has refused him.
   B. The novel gives us a “psychological” realism: Because the princess and Nemours are obsessing about each other, it makes psychological sense that they should have an uncanny awareness of each other.

III. This kind of fiction embodies the classical concept of verisimilitude.
   A. Whereas later fiction sought to present “realistic” details, the older concept of verisimilitude was more concerned with showing what is constant and predictable, rather than unique, in human life.
   B. In the older tradition, events should be conceptually true, whether or not they are literally likely to happen.
      1. It might not seem realistic that Nemours should be able to hear and see the princess in two very private moments, but both episodes are symbolic enactments of believable inner psychological experience.
      2. Likewise, it might not seem realistic that M. de Clèves should die of a broken heart, but he has indeed been symbolically murdered in his self-love.

IV. The novel reaches an unexpected ending.
   A. Tortured by jealousy and doubt, M. de Clèves falls ill and dies.
   B. Once M. de Clèves is dead, Nemours expects that his widow will be free to accept him.
   C. The princess, however, rejects his advances and leaves the court for a distant part of France, where she spends part of each year in a convent.
      1. In effect, she opts out of the standard plot of 17th-century tragedy, in which fatal passion would lead to disaster.
2. Moreover, because desire aims at what it doesn’t have, she knows that Nemours would be certain to leave her for other women, condemning her to the bitterness of jealousy.

3. Finally, she chooses a religious alternative that is never made explicit in this novel but is potentially available in the background. (Mme. de Lafayette is known to have been sympathetic to Jansenism.)

D. In the end, *La Princesse de Clèves* refuses the logic of plot but also of enlarged views of human relationships.

1. In conventional romances, the choice of spouse or lover is presented as crucial, but the princess turns back to a religious ethic that refuses both of those alternatives.

2. It is possible to regard this solution as a negative one and to see this great novel as imprisoned in an obsolescent worldview that cannot envision the possibility of companionate love or of evolving personality, as opposed to static character.

**Suggested Reading:**

See suggested titles for Lecture Four.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Does it make psychological sense that the Duc de Nemours would throw his life away in unavailing pursuit of a woman who repels his advances?

2. Does the concept of verisimilitude make sense in symbolic terms, or are such episodes as Nemours’s witnessing the princess’s private moments just not believable in (modern) novelistic terms?
Lecture Six
British Empiricism and the Self, I

Scope: This lecture turns to the philosophy of empiricism that provided the default framework for psychology throughout the 18th century. Replacing the disillusioned worldview of 17th-century aristocratic culture, empiricism was the empowering ideology of a middle-class culture that needed to see positive value in competition and to find a secure basis for cooperation in the social self. Empiricism gave a new emphasis to the integrity of the individual but was less successful in explaining the feelings of conflictedness that had been central to the earlier religious and secular explanations. In conclusion, the lecture explores some implications of empiricist psychology in the immensely influential writings of John Locke.

Outline

I. Until now, we have been concerned with writers in the latter part of the 17th century.
   A. Everything the thinkers of the Enlightenment tried to do was built on what went before and, often, in reaction to what went before.
   B. These earlier writers offered powerful insights into perennial problems of psychology that tended to be minimized or even ignored by the optimistic Enlightenment.

II. Empiricism became the dominant philosophy of the 18th century, emphasizing practical results rather than theoretical speculation.
   A. John Locke was the great popularizer of empiricism.
      1. As a physician and as a member of the Royal Society, Locke was deeply interested in the experimental method that became the centerpiece of modern science.
      2. The social contract, as Locke saw it, was a sensible agreement among independent individuals to establish various rules that would help society run smoothly.
      3. Locke was also closely involved with political events, and his Two Treatises of Government advanced a rationale for constitutional liberalism.
   B. In sketching the main outlines of the empiricist theory of knowledge, we can see the contrasts between French rationalism and British empiricism.
      1. French rationalism tried to attain clear and distinct ideas, pursuing a quest for certainty.
      2. In contrast, British empiricists accepted that certainty was impossible in most things and were willing to settle for probabilities and to reconsider their theories whenever new evidence came along.
   C. Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding developed an immensely influential theory of the self as integrated into society, with competitive individualism reconceived as a virtue rather than a threat.

III. The key premise of empiricism is that all knowledge comes through the senses.
   A. Each person begins life as a “blank slate,” or tabula rasa, free from Original Sin or any other prior shaping, and waits to be inscribed with sense data.
   B. All we can ever really know are individual bits of sense data, even if we agree to refer to them with abstract nouns, such as “tree” and “truth.”

IV. This theory has serious limitations in thinking about the self.
   A. The definition of a person becomes problematic.
      1. If we define who we are by linking up the sense data we have experienced, then whatever we can’t retrieve (for instance, when we’re asleep or forgetful) somehow ceases to be ourselves.
      2. There is no longer any possibility of an unconscious or of a stable core to the self that makes our behavior cohere even if we don’t understand or remember it.
      3. The self gets split into two parts, the part that acts and another part, an interior observer, that watches the part that acts; this paradox is closely related to the mind-body problem.
   B. Empiricism is strongly disapproving of the imagination.
      1. Judgment (the ability to see differences between things) is greatly admired, whereas wit (the ability to see similarities) is held under suspicion.
2. Imagination (the faculty of combining images) has the power to invent things that didn’t exist before and is, thus, seen as a serious threat.

3. Insanity is defined as a simple failure to add up the data correctly, and empiricism has no way of understanding neuroses or obsessions that influence behavior but are beyond conscious control.

4. Samuel Johnson’s personal experience and his account of a mentally ill person in his fable *Rasselas* illustrate the inadequacies of empiricist psychology for someone who felt disturbed and conflicted.

C. On its own terms, however, empiricism was an optimistic philosophy, and for people with secure personalities, it could be genuinely empowering.

**Suggested Reading:**
Walter Jackson Bate, *Samuel Johnson*.
Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: A Biography*.
Roger S. Woolhouse, *The Empiricists*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Has the method of experimental science become the default mode of thinking for the modern world?
2. If the self is defined by memory, is Locke right to say that whatever we can’t remember is no longer really ourselves?
Lecture Seven
British Empiricism and the Self, II

Scope: This lecture focuses on the Scottish philosopher David Hume, who exposed some crucial questions that Locke had evaded. Hume’s radical skepticism dissolved any possibility of knowing what the self is and reduced human life to an endless game of role playing, but he followed that destructive analysis with a highly positive account of the self in social interaction. Hume, like other Enlightenment thinkers, made nature his god-term, and his treatment of traditional religion reveals a blind spot in his version of psychology, an inability to imagine religious experience as anything other than delusion. The lecture concludes with the poet Alexander Pope, who struggled to make sense of inner conflict in the limiting confines of the empiricist framework.

Outline

I. David Hume pushed the implications of empiricism well beyond where Locke had left them.
   A. In 1739, when he was still only 28, Hume published what is still regarded as one of the central texts of modern philosophy, *A Treatise of Human Nature*.
      1. The first part focused on, and was titled, *Of the Understanding*.
      2. The second part, *Of the Passions*, attempted to give a comprehensive account of human behavior.
      3. The final part, *Of Morals*, considered the rules by which social life operates.
   B. Hume argued that because all knowledge is limited to “impressions” made by external objects, we can know nothing of the inner self except that it seems to be a bundle of impressions in endless flux.
      1. Employing reason against itself, Hume seeks to persuade people not to torment themselves with futile attempts to understand what can never be understood.
      2. The cure for introspective anxiety is to look outward and to participate in social interchange.
   C. In Hume’s philosophy, religion became virtually irrelevant, and many, including Samuel Johnson, saw his skepticism as dangerously corrosive, leaving life with no meaning at all.
      1. Johnson’s criticism implied that we know what truth is and that Hume is merely showing off when he invents skeptical paradoxes.
      2. Yet the real point of Hume’s analysis is to drop the whole idea of the individual explaining his inner self, realizing that nature intends us to look outward.
   D. For Hume and other empiricists, nature becomes the god-term.
      1. Instead of ranking reason above the passions as traditional psychology had done, Hume declares that reason should be the slave of the passions.
      2. This is because nature has shaped us to act best when we act according to instinct and when we cooperate with our fellows.
   E. For Hume and others, this philosophy entailed *determinism*, according to which everything happens as it must in accordance with antecedent causes.
      1. It can be argued that determinism appeals to people with harmonious temperaments who like the idea of acting according to natural causes, whereas troubled and conflicted people have a strong need to believe in free will.
      2. Samuel Johnson, who denounced Hume’s skepticism, is an example of a conflicted personality of the latter kind.

II. A distinction between character and personality was beginning to develop.
   A. The ideal of character, which Hume accepted, was that each person begins as a *tabula rasa* and can shape or construct a stable self.
   B. Other writers were groping toward a more flexible model of the self, capable of containing apparent contradictions, for which the term “personality” would eventually be coined.

III. Hume’s views on religion illustrate the emphases, and the limitations, of his thought.
   A. *Deism*, or “natural religion,” was the belief that everything we need to know about God can be deduced on empiricist terms from the phenomena of nature.
1. This deity is the creator who is responsible for the observable regularities of the universe.
2. This is not a god who cares about human beings, influences their lives, or expects their worship. Orthodox religious writers, therefore, attacked deism.

B. Hume sets up his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* as a debate between three characters, each of whom has a strong emotional stake in his position.
   1. One character is an orthodox believer who considers the world to be a complete mess because of Original Sin.
   2. A second character is a total skeptic who concludes that nature is fundamentally amoral and that the pain and suffering in the world do not serve any ultimate purpose but are, instead, part of the general wastefulness of nature.
   3. These two characters argue against a third who believes in natural religion, claiming that everything we need to know about God can be inferred from the phenomena of nature.

C. Hume exposed the complacency with which deists claimed that the universe was good even though it is clearly filled with suffering and waste.

D. But Hume also regarded all religion as delusion and showed little understanding of the reasons why people might be drawn to it or of the perennial problems that religion seeks to address.

IV. The poet Alexander Pope illustrates the limitations of empiricism in explaining the self.
   A. Pope views minds like eddies in a stream, constantly changing.
   B. Despite his awareness of the mysteriousness of behavior, Pope’s poems paint the standard empiricist picture, and he dismisses the mind’s eddies as irrelevant: When we go to sleep, real sense impressions stop coming in from outside; at that point, our fancy takes over, recycling in dreams the images received during the day.

Suggested Reading:
Leo Damrosch, *Fictions of Reality in the Age of Hume and Johnson*.
David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Martin Bell.
Donald W. Livingston, *Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life*.
Ernest C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*.
David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Skeptical Metaphysician*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Do modern psychological theories throw light on aspects of the self that Hume dismissed as unknowable, or would he be right to say that these too are just fictions?
2. Does it seem persuasive to say that well-adjusted personalities are the ones most likely to be attracted to theories of determinism?
Lecture Eight
Voltaire, *Candide*

**Scope:** Given this course’s focus on subjectivity and the self, Voltaire’s career and writings are a salutary reminder of the outwardly directed and pragmatic program of the Enlightenment. Voltaire dismissed introspection as a waste of time and directed his inspired propaganda at the historical events of the time—in *Candide*, the Seven Years’ War, in which European nations were vying for imperial power—which are strangely absent from most of the other works we read in the course. The philosophical optimism of Leibniz is parodied in a satiric fable in which love and cruelty and pain are all reduced to behaviorist stimuli and are given a quality of farce or black comedy by Voltaire’s brilliant prose style. Yet Voltaire also acknowledges that an instinctual life force keeps people going and suggests that instead of agonizing about insoluble problems we should learn to “cultivate our garden.”

**Outline**

I. Voltaire represents the militant reformist side of the Enlightenment and is impatient with religion and philosophy in the face of real-life human problems.
   A. The *philosophes* (who were public intellectuals rather than philosophers) criticized institutional religion as a form of thought control; Voltaire had been educated by the Jesuits and was particularly indignant at the power of the church.
   B. Current events play a central role in Voltaire’s fable *Candide*, as they do not in most of the works studied in this course or in philosophical thinking generally.
      1. The Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) was a world war fought for empire; Voltaire, who had broken with his former patron, Frederick the Great of Prussia, regarded it as horrific brutality.
      2. There are references in *Candide* to specific events, such as the execution of a British admiral as a scapegoat for a naval defeat.

II. The prime satiric target of *Candide* is the “optimistic” philosophy of Leibniz, who held that everything is ultimately for the best in the best of all possible worlds, even if individual humans may happen to suffer.
   A. In his earlier years, Voltaire was strongly attracted to *deism* (“natural religion”), which deduced a benevolent God from the phenomena of nature.
   B. A catastrophic 1755 earthquake in Lisbon caused many people, Voltaire included, to rethink their complacent beliefs. Voltaire wrote a bitter poem about it.
   C. *Candide* reduces the Leibnizian philosophy to absurdity.
      1. The tutor Pangloss invariably but preposterously claims that the most appalling sufferings contribute to the good of the whole.
      2. Voltaire’s implicit position is that there is no reason to assume any kind of moral basis in the universe: Things just happen, whether or not they bring waste and suffering along with them.
      3. The characters in *Candide* exhibit a behaviorist psychology in which they simply respond to external stimuli, which renders moot conventional ways of talking about behavior.

III. The wit of *Candide* is essential to its effect, but it does arrive at a qualified positive ending.
   A. Black humor or farce allow us to laugh at things that can’t be changed and must be endured.
   B. In spite of their misfortunes, people insist on continuing to live, and it appears that the life force is an instinctual impulse that keeps us all going.
   C. *Candide* presents a significant pattern of three gardens.
      1. At the beginning of the book, Candide is expelled from a parodic Garden of Eden in Germany.
      2. Toward the middle, he spends time in a South American utopia called Eldorado but becomes bored there and returns (with plenty of gold) to the variety and challenges of life as we know it.
      3. At the end, true love isn’t the solution to anything, and there is no room for hereditary aristocracy and institutional religion. Candide and some friends settle down in a sort of commune in Turkey, where they give up ambitions and expectations and devote themselves to honest work: “We must cultivate our garden.”
Suggested Reading:
Peter Gay, *Voltaire's Politics: The Poet as Realist*.
Haydn Mason, *Voltaire: A Biography*.
———, *Voltaire*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is it possible to accept a universe that lacks any kind of moral meaning, or is the human mind irrevocably moral by its very nature?
2. Can black humor or farce help us to bear suffering, or do they serve really to highlight its painfulness when the laughter is over?
Lecture Nine
Voltaire, Johnson, Gibbon—Some Lives

Scope: As an approach to 18th-century ways of understanding human behavior, this lecture considers biographies by several major writers to show how hard it was to recognize, let alone to explain, issues that would later become central in biographical explanation. Voltaire’s biography of Charles XII of Sweden gives a two-dimensional picture of overweening pride. Samuel Johnson, even while invoking the empiricist principle of individuality, tries to combine it with a classical demand for constants or generalities, and his life of Pope falls short of explaining what was painfully personal in Pope’s art and life. Gibbon’s great history of Rome similarly focuses on universal aspects of human experience at the expense of the unique and inexplicable, and his autobiography ignores much that a modern interpretation would identify as significant in his own experience.

Outline

I. Biography in the 18th century remained within the assumptions of the formal “character.”
   A. Biographers tried to build up a consistent picture of character; thus, they tended to ignore or minimize inconsistencies in order to present “philosophical history.”
   B. They used an elegant prose style to embody a masterly overview, instead of acknowledging the confusion of much of life.

II. Voltaire’s biography of Charles XII of Sweden is strangely two-dimensional, painting a simple picture of an egomaniac who lives to fight.
   A. The king’s military career is emphasized, at the expense of his other interests, and he becomes a simple figure of overweening pride.
   B. Even with respect to the military context, Voltaire doesn’t consider the complex geopolitical concerns that motivated Charles.
   C. Samuel Johnson’s poetic account of Charles likewise assumes universal human motives and reduces his story to generalities.
   D. Voltaire is still confined in an old-fashioned model of presentation, narrating events but doing little to explain motivation and behavior.

III. Hume, in a brief sketch of his own life, likewise paints a simplified picture.
   A. He puts a continuously positive spin on everything, including his own death.
   B. Hume describes himself in an objective and very general way.
   C. Later on, we will see Benjamin Franklin doing exactly the same thing.

IV. In Johnson’s life of Alexander Pope, some kinds of interpretation that would seem obvious to a modern biographer are never envisioned.
   A. Pope’s physical disability is vividly described, but not the psychological pain it caused or the way in which Pope developed his literary talent in compensation.
   B. Pope’s unwillingness ever to be seen laughing, even though he was a witty satirist, is likewise not questioned for what it might reveal.

V. Edward Gibbon gives us an overview of Olympian detachment.
   A. Gibbon was fluent in classical Latin and, unlike Voltaire, he had great respect for detailed factual information.
   B. His masterwork, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, narrates complicated events brilliantly well but is less effective when dealing with motivation.
      1. Gibbon assumes that each person is driven by a “ruling passion” that provides the key to everything he does.
2. As his account of the emperor Commodus illustrates, he has no way of understanding, or even imagining, motiveless cruelty and sadism.

3. Gibbon’s work illustrates how the Enlightenment, in doing away with the concept of evil, which it saw as the product of a mistaken religious system, was left without an explanation for the very things the concept of evil was meant to explain.

C. Gibbon’s *Autobiography* gives a similarly generalized picture, even when he is describing his own life.
   1. He tells of an early love affair in generic terms and sees himself as torn between the fixed roles of lover and son.
   2. Enlightenment thought was committed to objectivity, but what biographers needed to do as well was to represent subjectivity.
   3. From a modern perspective, Gibbon, like Pope, compensated for his limitations by living through his art, but this is not a concept that he himself would have understood.

**Suggested Reading:**

W. B. Carnochan, *Gibbon’s Solitude: The Inward World of the Historian*.


**Questions to Consider:**

1. Does any biographer, even today, need a conception of consistent character as the basis for biography?

2. Is the concept of compensation a helpful way of understanding such writers as Pope and Gibbon, or does it reflect psychoanalytic presuppositions that aren’t necessarily relevant?
Lecture Ten
Boswell, The London Journal, I

Scope: This lecture introduces a young writer who was just starting out in life and had no pretensions to theoretical analysis, but whose daily journal is an ideal place to see crucial cultural issues coming into view. James Boswell attempts to choose a vocation and to shape a character according to various literary models, but his true commitment is to authenticity of feeling. Again, modern insights can throw light on the stories he somewhat artlessly tells: He is only partly aware of his temperamental narcissism, his rebellious passivity in the face of demands that he is reluctant to satisfy, and his reliance on the “true language of the heart” without the suspicion that it can be a mask for self-serving role-playing.

Outline
I. The London Journal, a diary kept by the young James Boswell in 1762–1763, gives valuable insight into problems of the self as experienced by an actual person. The problems he raises are important symptoms, exposing issues that the culture as a whole will have to acknowledge and try to deal with.
   A. Boswell’s diaries were not intended for publication and, in fact, were utterly unknown until the 20th century.
      1. Boswell faithfully kept his diaries and even used them as a source of material when writing his classic Life of Samuel Johnson.
      2. Boswell’s descendants were embarrassed by his diaries, and the works were rediscovered only in the 1920s.
   B. Unlike novels or even autobiographies, diaries present an untold life with no retrospective story line imposed on it.
      1. Boswell’s London Journal is not an autobiography because its author is just setting out in the world; the possibilities are still wide open.
      2. It is, rather, a kind of serial autobiography, tracing the experience of becoming who you are.
      3. The typical Calvinist diary was intended to search for signs of election to salvation. Though Boswell was brought up in a strict Calvinist Presbyterian household, he used his diaries to find out who he was, not whether he was saved.
II. Boswell’s self-understanding centers on the newly positive role of emotion, or feeling.
   A. He does his best to generate appropriate emotions in himself, such as warm feelings toward his parents when he’s delighted to be leaving home.
   B. But he can’t help relishing the free play of imagination, even though he knows he is supposed to keep it in check.
III. Mid-18th-century developments in usage help us to gauge the changing attitudes to which Boswell responds.
   A. The terms “sentiment” and “sensibility” take on new connotations to express the increased value placed on feeling.
   B. Boswell aspires to an ideal of sincerity, but given that one can be sincere yet also self-deceived, the modern concept of authenticity is more helpful: his need to be himself instead of living according to other people’s expectations.
IV. A distinction between character and personality is also illuminating for Boswell.
   A. Boswell tried to model himself on admired role models, even if these were incompatible, to construct a stable character.
      1. The idealized persona of “Mr. Spectator,” a tolerant and detached observer of the London scene, was especially appealing.
      2. He also emulated acquaintances, such as a dashing actor, who were very different from the sober lawyer he was expected to become.
   B. Boswell’s deeper intuitions reflect a sense of individual personality, accepting its contradictions instead of trying to eliminate them.
1. He feels most fully himself when he is able to simply exist in the present moment, without worrying about the past or future.
2. Despite his stern father’s disgust with his conduct, he knows that when he behaves in approved ways, he’s deeply inauthentic (acting in bad faith, to use a modern existentialist term).
3. Another modern analysis helps to clarify behavior that Boswell couldn’t have understood: He has a narcissistic need to see his insecure self-image reinforced by the reactions of other people.
4. It could also be argued that what Boswell’s diary really shows is the hollowness of the ideal of sincerity or authenticity and the fundamental function of role-playing in his life.

Suggested Reading:
Peter Martin, *A Life of James Boswell*.
Frederick A. Pottle, *James Boswell: The Earlier Years, 1740–1769*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is it possible to achieve a deep understanding of one’s own behavior, or do all of us tend to understand our lives in conventional terms, for instance, as characters in novels or romances?
2. When Boswell tries to express the true “language of the heart,” is he approaching an ideal of authenticity or just role-playing in a different way?
Lecture Eleven

The London Journal, II

Scope: This lecture continues the reading of the London Journal, noting the ways in which Boswell strives impressively to reconcile his conflicted feelings but also invoking modern perspectives that can clarify what he has trouble understanding: his role-playing in erotic encounters and his euphemistic language in describing them; his attraction to prostitutes and the problem of prostitution as a social phenomenon; the threat of what he calls “melancholy,” which today would be called bipolar disorder, and Samuel Johnson as a role model who can help him to live with it; his need to accept his urge for pleasure and the London Journal as an instance of art that serves as safety valve for repression. The lecture concludes by observing that psychology needed to deal with what Boswell describes in his own experience, the dynamic nature of psychic life, and looks forward to the theme of role-playing that will be considered in the lectures that follow this one.

Outline

I. Boswell’s confusion about his divided feelings is exemplified in his relations with women.
   A. Although he spends time with fashionable ladies of his own class, his strongest interest focuses on lower-class women, often prostitutes.
   B. His extended account of a flirtation with an actress he calls “Louisa” illustrates his complicated feelings.
      1. Boswell begins by courting Louisa as if he were a respectable gentleman, but because actresses were thought to be women of loose morals, he assumes that an assignation will ensue.
      2. Louisa agrees to spend a night with Boswell at an inn, and his account of the event is a collection of clichés.
      3. What becomes clear is that Boswell is playing a whole series of roles and that the only true thing in the story is his outrage when he discovers that he has caught a venereal disease.
      4. Interestingly, Boswell wrote the whole story down after it was over; he told the story as a novelist would.
      5. Modern ideas can help to throw light on what was happening; Freud’s essay “The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in the Erotic Life” describes men like Boswell who were inhibited with women of their own class but freer with lower-class women.
   C. Boswell’s experiences with prostitutes and his attempts to understand his behavior give further insight into his personality.
      1. He likes to improvise scenes in which the women he picks up can appear to be genuinely attracted to him, rather than doing it for money.
      2. He is most comfortable when overtly playing a role, such as the dashing Captain Macheath in The Beggar’s Opera.
      3. What Boswell can’t grasp (though later on, Blake will) is the status of prostitution as a larger social problem and the victimization of the young women he picks up.

II. The deepest threat for Boswell was the fear of insanity.
   A. He knew that a dangerous “melancholy” ran in his family; today, it would be called manic depression or bipolar disorder.
   B. Samuel Johnson, who had overcome his own “melancholy” to achieve greatness, became an ideal role model.
      1. Johnson, however, believed in rigorous repression of unwanted impulses.
      2. Boswell was more inclined to indulge the imagination to create a fantasy version of life that would be preferable to reality.

III. Boswell’s journals were essential for his self-therapy, and they raise important questions that later writers will explore.
   A. The journals are works of art, serving as safety valves for the repressed feelings he cannot fully acknowledge.
B. In Boswell’s own analysis, he suffers from “hypochondria,” defined as “an excess of spleen that generates mental disturbance.”
   1. Empiricist psychology had no way of addressing the psychological suffering that Boswell experienced.
   2. His own analysis, in a periodical called The Hypochondriack, describes a condition of inauthenticity, in which he feels passive and ashamed when he tries to satisfy the demands of others.
   3. The challenge for Enlightenment psychology will be to accept the conflicted and dynamic nature of psychic life.

C. In Rousseau, we will study a writer who deeply explores the issues a person like Boswell raises, but first, in Diderot, we will look at a writer who treats role-playing as the only reality there is.

Suggested Reading:
See suggested titles for Lecture Nine.

Questions to Consider:
1. Does the Louisa episode ring true as an accurate account of an event, or does it feel as if it has been edited and given shape in the act of writing it down?
2. To what extent is Boswell able to recognize the significance of symptoms that would be diagnosed today as pointing to bipolar disorder?
Lecture Twelve
Diderot’s Dialogues

Scope: This lecture introduces Denis Diderot, a many-faceted writer who gave 15 years of his life to overseeing the *Encyclopédie*, the great propaganda weapon of the Enlightenment that aspired to promote open inquiry and make technological knowledge available to all. In other unpublished writings Diderot used the dialogue form to pose provocative questions. *D’Alembert’s Dream* explores the materialist view that all the phenomena of existence, including the human mind, are nothing more than forms of matter and that, far from having been created in original perfection by God, the universe undergoes perpetual change. *Rameau’s Nephew* is a debate between two characters, Diderot himself, who asserts traditional philosophical and moral values, and the journeyman musician Rameau, who lives as a parasite on rich patrons, insists that all of life is nothing but cynical role-playing, and advances a theory of art as unconnected with our usual moral values.

Outline

I. Diderot played a central role in the public mission of the Enlightenment.
   A. He was editor of the great *Encyclopedia of the Sciences, Arts, and Trades*, to which he devoted 15 years of his life.
      1. The aim of the *Encyclopedia* was to make knowledge, especially practical and technological knowledge, freely available to all. It treated knowledge as interrelated, not hierarchical.
      2. It reflected the commitment of the *philosophes* to an ideology of progress or “religion of humanity,” which might well conflict with established political and religious systems.
   B. Diderot’s most interesting work was not published in his lifetime.
      1. Early in his career, he used empiricist arguments in his *Letter on the Blind* to cast doubt on the innate understanding of moral truths.
      2. He was imprisoned for several months and set free only on the promise never to publish subversive material again.

II. *D’Alembert’s Dream* explores the implications of materialism.
   A. The work is preceded by a brief *Conversation* in which Diderot and his *Encyclopedia* colleague, the mathematician d’Alembert, discuss the empiricist claim that the self is based on memory.
      1. Diderot is concerned with the then-shocking philosophy of *materialism*—“matter as the sole basis of all living forms and of all values.”
      2. He argues that humans share a subrational kind of organization with other life forms.
   B. In *D’Alembert’s Dream*, two of d’Alembert’s friends, his doctor and mistress, debate similar issues while the mathematician talks in his sleep and reveals a mode of existence that empiricism couldn’t account for.
      1. The dialogue invokes pre-Darwinian ideas about evolution, casting doubt on the received doctrine that God created every existing form at the beginning of the world.
      2. Human beings are not uniquely different from all other beings but are products of an evolutionary development that continues to change.
      3. This line of thinking suggests that women are not fundamentally different from men and certainly not inferior to them.
      4. Personal identity is no longer a simple matter of memory, but a hard-to-define unity like that of a swarm of bees or a spiderweb.

III. *Rameau’s Nephew* explores the paradoxes of role-playing in social life.
   A. Diderot sets up the work as a dialogue between himself and a journeyman musician named Jean-François Rameau, nephew of the great Jean-Philippe Rameau.
      1. The two speakers, called “me” and “him,” are really aspects of Diderot himself, the first arguing for meaning and truth in human life, the other asserting that we are all parasites and that everything we do is putting on an act.
2. Diderot tended not to complete what he began, and this much-revised work allowed him to pursue his ideas freely.

B. Rameau is given striking arguments to support his view that role-playing is fundamental to human life.
   1. He has made a career out of fawning on the rich, but he can’t help feeling self-disgust, and he sometimes allows a sarcastic remark to slip out that costs him dearly.
   2. The possibility of sincerity or authenticity is at stake here, and although the Diderot figure in the dialogue tries to defend truth and virtue, he has trouble refuting Rameau’s cynicism.
   3. Given that both the “he” and the “me” are aspects of Diderot, Rameau’s Nephew exposes disturbing doubts that he himself felt.

IV. Rameau’s Nephew highlights new ideas about the aesthetic.
   A. Classical thought held that art should hold a mirror up to nature, showing the meaning of events and confirming moral values.
   B. During the 18th century, theorists began to see the aesthetic as a separate realm with its own internal coherence and logic.
      1. Artists began to be glorified as creative geniuses who express, from within, a personal vision. For example, Mozart, though incredibly gifted, thought of his music as a craft, whereas Beethoven, a generation later, thought of his music as embodying a personal vision of truth.
      2. The example of Jean-Philippe Rameau suggests that a great artist may well be an objectionable human being, who creates beauty but not moral truth.
      3. The Diderot character in the dialogue is alarmed by these views but doesn’t know how to refute them.
      4. In a work called Paradox on the Actor, Diderot, a successful playwright, claims that the best actors are detached from the feelings they simulate on stage; this throws disturbing light on the way people show emotions in real life, even when they think they are being sincere.
   C. As the philosopher Hegel later argued, Rameau’s Nephew represents the self-critique of the Enlightenment: In exposing the limitations of traditional values, it may have left no room for values at all.

Suggested Reading:
Denis Diderot, Rameau’s Nephew and D’Alembert’s Dream, trans. Leonard Tancock.
Peter France, Diderot.
P. N. Furbank, Diderot: A Critical Biography.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is an ideal of authenticity incompatible with a recognition that everyone, to some extent, can’t help playing roles?
2. Is it true that stories about crime and wickedness are enjoyable to read, and if so, is the realm of the aesthetic immune from normal moral values?
Timeline

1637 ................................................ Descartes, Discourse on Method
1649 ................................................ Execution of King Charles I of England
1651 ................................................ Hobbes, Leviathan
1660 ................................................ The Restoration in England (Puritans ousted; Charles II returns from exile in France)
1664 ................................................ La Rochefoucauld, Maxims
1666 ................................................ Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners
1670 ................................................ Pascal, Pensées
1677 ................................................ Racine, Phèdre
1678 ................................................ Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress
                                             Lafayette, La Princesse de Clèves
1685 ................................................ Halifax, A Character of King Charles II
1688 ................................................ The “Glorious Revolution,” in which Parliament deposed King James II without bloodshed and replaced him with William and Mary
1690 ................................................ Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
1715 ................................................ Death of Louis XIV of France
1731 ................................................ Voltaire, History of Charles XII
1733 ................................................ Pope, An Essay on Man
1739 ................................................ Hume, Treatise of Human Nature
1751 ................................................ Encyclopedia, vol. I
1755 ................................................ Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality
1756 ................................................ Start of the Seven Years’ War
                                             Voltaire, Poem on the Disaster at Lisbon
1759 ................................................ Voltaire, Candide
                                             Johnson, Rasselas
                                             Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments
1761 ................................................ Rousseau, Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse
1762 ................................................ Rousseau, The Social Contract
                                             Rousseau, Émile
                                             Boswell, London Journal (pub. 1950)
1760s ................................................ Diderot’s unpublished works begun and continued for many years (Jacques the Fatalist was not published until 1796 and Rameau’s Nephew, not until 1823)
1765 ................................................ Rousseau, Confessions begun (pub. 1782)
1771 ................................................ Franklin, Autobiography begun (pub. 1818)
1776 ................................................ American Revolution
                                             Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. I
                                             Smith, The Wealth of Nations
                                             Rousseau, Reveries of the Solitary Walker (pub. 1782)
1779................................................ Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*
                        Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

1782................................................ Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*

1789................................................ French Revolution
                        Blake, *Songs of Innocence*

1790................................................ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (completed 1792)

1791................................................ Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*

1794................................................ Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*
Glossary

Amour-propre: “Self-love” in French, the sin of pride according to the religious tradition, and an innate selfishness according to 17th-century secular writers but rehabilitated in the Enlightenment as a natural and instinctive self-regard.

Calvinism: The theology of John Calvin (1509–1564) and his followers, a pessimistic doctrine of predestination in which some people are among the “elect,” chosen by God for salvation, but the great majority are “reprobate” and doomed to damnation despite anything they may do in their lives.

Character: On the analogy of printer’s characters that physically imprint marks on paper, a stable and coherent character was the classical psychological ideal and survived vigorously in the 18th century; the modern concept of personality was only just starting to develop.

Deism: Also known as natural religion, a belief that everything humans need to know about God can be deduced rationally from the phenomena of nature (thus rendering revelation and faith unnecessary); the deist God created the universe as a complex machine but may or may not take any further interest in it.

Determinism: A belief that everything happens inevitably in response to a succession of causes; in the 18th century, a strictly mechanical determinism was not always distinguished from fatalism, which implied some sort of meaning in the way events transpire.

Empiricism: The dominant philosophy of the 18th century, rejecting innate ideas and holding that all knowledge is of particular sense data, which the mind somehow recombines to form an understanding of itself and the world; empiricism was the enabling ideology of experimental science.

Enlightenment (in French, les lumières): An activist program of research and reform, centering on French thinkers known as philosophes (pragmatic critics of society and traditional dogmas rather than abstract philosophers), with the multivolume Encyclopedia as its centerpiece.

Fatalism: See determinism.

Jansenism: Somewhat like Protestant Calvinism, a strand of Catholic theology that emphasized human sinfulness and divine predestination.

Liberalism: The economic theory that competitive individualism, with each person striving to maximize his or her advantage, produces the greatest happiness for all; its descendant in modern America is known as conservatism.

Materialism: The doctrine that nothing exists in the universe except matter in motion and that all mental, emotional, and spiritual experience is a direct reflection of physical causes.

Melancholy: Originally conceived of as an imbalance of one of the four humors, the term was much broader than it is today and indicated obsessive mental imbalance or neurosis.

Natural religion: See deism.

Nature: In classical and medieval times, nature meant “everything that exists in the universe”; during the 18th century, it came to mean the world of mountains and forests apart from man and took on a quasi-religious role as a source of value and meaning.

Optimism: The philosophy associated with Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), who claimed that suffering could be explained and, indeed, justified as the necessary byproduct of a universe in which the totality is for the best, even if individuals may happen to suffer.

Original Sin: The Christian doctrine that when Adam and Eve, tempted by Satan but acting on their own free will, disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit of knowledge, they condemned their posterity to a life of sinfulness from which only divine grace could rescue them.

Passions: The fundamental emotions, traditionally understood to be (as the cognate word passive suggests) involuntary drives that ought to be held in check by reason; Enlightenment psychology found positive value in the passions.

Philosophes: See Enlightenment.
Romanticism: The Europe-wide movement that arose in reaction to Enlightenment empiricism; it took many different forms but tended to stress imaginative perception or intuition and a return to spiritual values that the Enlightenment had denigrated.

Sentiment: Emotion or feeling.
Biographical Notes

Aubrey, John (1626–1697). Collector of biographical anecdotes, which were published after his death as *Brief Lives of Eminent Men*.

Blake, William (1757–1827). Self-taught poet and artist who developed a highly original myth that embodied profound criticism of Enlightenment thinking.

Boswell, James (1740–1795). Scottish lawyer, author of richly detailed diaries that were unpublished until the 20th century and of the classic *Life of Samuel Johnson*.

Bunyan, John (1628–1688). Baptist preacher who wrote the classic *Pilgrim’s Progress* while imprisoned for refusing to give up preaching.

Descartes, René (1596–1650). Mathematician and philosopher, author of the *Discourse on Method*, which sought to ground all knowledge in the fundamental intuition “I think, therefore I am.”

Diderot, Denis (1713–1784). Central figure in the French Enlightenment; edited the great *Encyclopedia* and produced successful plays but is best known today for unpublished works, such as *Jacques the Fatalist* and *Rameau’s Nephew*.

Franklin, Benjamin (1705–1790). American printer, scientist, and statesman, who left Boston in his teens to become a leading figure in Philadelphia; made important contributions to the study of electricity; and after the American Revolution, became one of the most admired of the Founding Fathers. Author of an *Autobiography* not published until the 19th century.

Gibbon, Edward (1737–1794). Reclusive writer (though he served for a few years in Parliament); author of the great history *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and of an *Autobiography* that was published after his death.

Halifax, George Savile, first Marquess of (1633–1695). Statesman who promoted toleration and parliamentary sovereignty; author of a trenchant memoir of King Charles II.


Hume, David (1711–1776). Scottish philosopher and historian whose *Treatise of Human Nature* and other works are the definitive expressions of empiricist thought.

Johnson, Samuel (1709–1784). Scholar, critic, and essayist who dominated London literary life in the second half of the 18th century; among his works are the first major edition of Shakespeare, the first comprehensive English dictionary, and a set of critical biographies, *The Lives of the English Poets*.

Laclos, Choderlos de (1741–1803). Army officer whose *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* is a masterpiece of French fiction; in later years, he served as a general under Napoleon.

Lafayette, Marie-Madeleine de (1634–1693). Hostess of an influential salon in the court of Louis XIV and author of several works of fiction, most notably *La Princesse de Clèves*.

La Rochefoucauld, François, Duc de (1613–1680). Military officer who became a central figure in the intellectual life of Louis XIV’s court; author of the epigrammatic *Maxims* on human behavior.

Locke, John (1632–1704). Physician and philosopher whose *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was a formative text in British empiricism and whose *Two Treatises of Government* was an important defense of parliamentary supremacy over the monarchy.

Pascal, Blaise (1623–1662). Mathematician and religious thinker, closely connected to the Jansenist movement, whose *Pensées* (“Thoughts”) is a classic of religious writing.

Pope, Alexander (1688–1744). The leading English poet of the 18th century; author of social satires and of *An Essay on Man*. 

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Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1712–1778). Geneva-born musician, novelist, and theorist; author of *A Discourse on Inequality* and *The Social Contract* (classics of social thought), *Émile* (a groundbreaking treatise on education), *Julie* (the bestselling novel of the 18th century) and *Confessions* (one of the most important autobiographies ever written).

Smith, Adam (1723–1790). Professor at the University of Glasgow; author of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which proposed a psychological basis for modern individualism, and *The Wealth of Nations*, a classic of economics.

Voltaire (1694–1778). Born François-Marie Arouet, a playwright, poet, and tireless propagandist for the Enlightenment program of intellectual and social reform; among his scores of works is the classic satire *Candide*. 
Bibliography

Primary Sources:
These are the basic texts for the course, in excellent modern editions and translations (passages quoted from French in the lectures, however, are my own translations). All are available in paperback and have good critical and historical introductions.

For those who would like to read the French texts in the original, excellent modern editions are available in most of the major paperback series: Éditions Garnier, Garnier Flammarion, Gallimard Folio Classique, Livres de Poche, and so on. I have noted below one exceptionally valuable hardbound edition, the Oeuvres Complètes of Rousseau in the Pléiade series.


———. William Blake Archive. A magnificent Web site at the University of Virginia, constantly being enlarged, offering the complete text of Blake’s works and superb color reproductions of his “illuminated books” (http://www.blakearchive.org/main.html).


———. *My Own Life*, reprinted in various collections of his work, such as *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987). A brief and curiously dispassionate overview of Hume’s life as he saw it at the very end.


———. *A Discourse on Inequality*, trans. Maurice Cranston (New York: Penguin, 1984). Excellent translation and introduction by a political scientist who was also Rousseau’s most recent biographer.


**Secondary Sources:**

There are innumerable studies, many of them very valuable, on the various aspects of cultural and literary history covered in this course. The following list is confined to selected works that avoid undue specialization and will engage the interest of the general reader; all of them are mentioned in the “Suggested Reading” sections of the lecture outlines.


Martin, Peter. *A Life of James Boswell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). A good overview of Boswell’s life, including the later years that Pottle’s biography didn’t reach.


Morgan, Edmund S. *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Briefer than the Brands biography and focused on episodes in Franklin’s life that throw light on his personality.


The Enlightenment Invention
of the Modern Self
Part II
Professor Leo Damrosch
Leo Damrosch, Ph.D.
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Leo Damrosch was born in the Philippines, where his parents were missionaries. He received a B.A. from Yale in 1963; an M.A. from Cambridge University, where he was a Marshall Scholar, in 1966; and a Ph.D. from Princeton in 1968. He has taught at the University of Virginia, from 1968 to 1983; at the University of Maryland in College Park, until 1989; and since 1989, at Harvard, where for a five-year term, he was chairman of the Department of English. In 2001, he was named a Harvard College Professor in recognition of distinguished teaching. Professor Damrosch has held National Endowment for the Humanities and Guggenheim research fellowships and, on four occasions, has directed National Endowment for the Humanities summer seminars for college teachers. His books include *Samuel Johnson and the Tragic Sense*, *The Uses of Johnson’s Criticism*, *Symbol and Truth in Blake’s Myth*, *God’s Plot and Man’s Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding*, *The Imaginative World of Alexander Pope*, *Fictions of Reality in the Age of Hume and Johnson*, and *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus: James Nayler and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit*. Professor Damrosch lives in Newton, Massachusetts, with his wife, Joyce Van Dyke, and their two sons.
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The Enlightenment Invention of the Modern Self

Scope:

This course studies a wide range of works, from the 1670s to the 1790s, by writers in France and Britain who struggled to understand the paradoxes of the self at a time when traditional religious and philosophical formulas were breaking down and who formulated fundamental questions in ways that have remained important and troubling ever since. The philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of “the senses of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature which are at home in the modern West.” Yet these convictions coexist with a very different set of assumptions according to which the self is socially conditioned and enjoys neither individuality nor freedom, except as consoling illusions. All modern thinkers about psychology and society have had to recognize the tension between these two modes of thinking. On the one hand, we feel that we have a strong intuition of our individuality and self-sufficiency; on the other hand, we have an equally strong intuition that the self is largely shaped by exterior forces. Whenever we address these issues, whether in our personal reflections or in the framework of an intellectual discipline, such as philosophy, psychology, or sociology, we are using concepts and terms that we have inherited from the 18th-century Enlightenment.

The first five lectures introduce the Enlightenment as a cultural movement and explore some earlier interpretations of psychological experience that prevailed at the end of the 17th century, focusing on the religious writings of Bunyan and Pascal, the philosophy of Descartes, and the aristocratic ethos embodied in the aphorisms of La Rochefoucauld and the pioneering novel La Princesse de Clèves by Mme de Lafayette.

The sixth and seventh lectures present the empiricist philosophy, originating in Britain, that became the default form of explanation in the 18th century. Special attention is given to some important questions that this new philosophy tended to minimize and that the writers we will study had to find new ways to address. The eighth lecture looks at Voltaire’s mordant satire Candide to illustrate the Enlightenment’s emphasis on social and political issues and its tendency to dismiss psychological analysis as essentially irrelevant. The ninth lecture seeks to show that even the most successful writers of biography—Voltaire, Gibbon, and Johnson—were still working with intellectual tools that were old-fashioned and, in many ways, inadequate, indicating the increasingly apparent need for new kinds of explanation to be developed.

The tenth and eleventh lectures discuss a remarkably fresh and original piece of writing, a diary kept by James Boswell when he was in his early 20s and unpublished until the 20th century, that reflects a real-life struggle to resolve issues that thinkers were just beginning to formulate in modern terms. The next seven lectures turn to a fascinating odd couple, close friends for many years but eventually enemies, Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Diderot, a witty conversationalist and energetic editor of the central propaganda weapon of the Enlightenment, the multivolume Encyclopedia, expressed a highly skeptical view of psychological self-understanding in his unpublished experimental works, the dialogues Rameau’s Nephew and D’Alembert’s Dream, and the parodic anti-novel Jacques the Fatalist. Rousseau, on the other hand, advanced a theory that human beings once enjoyed a condition of psychic wholeness in a precivilized state of nature and argued that it ought to be possible to undo some of the damage society causes in individuals and achieve a more authentic existence. He put forward this theory in his groundbreaking Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, drew political implications from it in the immensely influential Social Contract, and literally invented modern autobiography in his Confessions. These great works will be studied as a group to bring out their profound interconnectedness.

Lectures Nineteen through Twenty-Two explore the state of ideas as the 18th century neared its close. The autobiography of Benjamin Franklin presents a coherent portrait of a harmonious and integrated individual who strives to make his public self and private self a seamless whole, and the psychological and economic theories of Adam Smith give a theoretical basis for this view of life. Very differently, Laclos’s great novel Les Liaisons Dangereuses exposes the potentially limitless ambiguity of any attempt to understand what really motivates human beings and leaves its readers in a disturbing ethical limbo.

The final two lectures look forward to the Romantic period, in which the achievement of the Enlightenment would be both extended and criticized, focusing on William Blake’s superbly imaginative pictures and poems that brilliantly reconceive the central issues of the course.

The guiding premise of the course is that ideas are best understood in the context of particular works, where they gain depth and life from the experience of gifted individuals. Conveniently available paperback editions of the...
principal texts are recommended, and a central purpose of the course is to inspire people to read these texts, either concurrently as they are discussed in the lectures or afterward in the light of the course as a whole. Above all, it is important to honor the uniqueness of great works of imagination, whether they take the form of philosophy, of autobiography, or of fiction. If Newton had never lived, Leibniz would still have invented the calculus; if Rousseau and Blake had never lived, no one else could conceivably have written The Confessions or The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.
Lecture Thirteen
Diderot, Jacques the Fatalist, I

Scope: This lecture introduces Diderot’s novel Jacques the Fatalist, which wittily presents a world in which the narrator can never be trusted to tell a reliable story. Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy provided a model: Digressions take over from plot in a new kind of art that is expressive (reflecting individual imaginations) rather than mimetic (offering a faithful imitation of “reality”). The patterns that we perceive in our lives are shown to fulfill a psychological need rather than being insights into reality, and the characters function like cartoons that behave in predictably behaviorist ways but offer no insight into anything “inside.”

Outline

I. Diderot’s anti-novel raises important issues concerning the “realism” that is often attributed to the novel.
   A. The main impetus for the development of modern fiction, starting in the late 17th century, was an appetite for realism on the part of the consuming public, particularly a growing middle class.
      1. This new fiction was totally different from the idealized romances of King Arthur or Tristan and Isolde.
      2. It was also different from allegories, such as The Pilgrim’s Progress, the purpose of which was to teach eternal truths.
   B. Most novels of the time used one of three possible points of view.
      1. Novels with omniscient narrators sought to show and explain everything, including what happens inside characters’ heads.
      2. Novels with first-person narrators simulated the immediacy of personal experience but, as a result, were unable to show anything the narrator didn’t personally see or understand.
      3. Epistolary novels purported to be the letters of several different characters. They gave an illusion of real-time immediacy, and the author, who pretends to be merely an editor, can give the reader different angles and perspectives on the various letter writers.
   C. Following Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, Jacques the Fatalist refuses to be “realistic” and develops a metafictional perspective on the way we normally try to find “truth” in works of fiction.
      1. Tristram Shandy is an ostentatiously jokey book, published in installments over a period of years, by a rather raffish clergyman, Laurence Sterne.
      2. Most readers of the time, including Samuel Johnson, viewed the book as merely whimsical.
      3. It was rediscovered by modernist writers in the 20th century, who were impressed by how the narrator’s consciousness drifts in unpredictable directions.
      4. Tristram Shandy is filled with embedded texts from out-of-the-way sources and physical images that remind us that a book is only a book.
      5. From Diderot’s point of view, the most interesting aspect of the book is its overt dismissal of plot. Sterne considered that “Digressions are the sunshine—they are the life, the soul of reading!”

II. Diderot rejects the assumptions of classical literary theory.
   A. Whereas plot was traditionally the heart of a fictional work, Diderot (following Sterne) builds up Jacques the Fatalist with endless digressions.
      1. This highlights the subjective expressivity of the author, as contrasted with the older objective ideal of “holding the mirror up to nature.”
      2. Like Sterne, he makes clear that a book is only a book, not reality.
      3. Traditional plots are shown to be predictably conventional, gratifying readers’ wishes but not necessarily revealing truths about life. This fits in well with the philosophy of empiricism: Life is an endless stream of particulars, and it is our minds that invent connections between them.
      4. Diderot constantly intrudes in the actual narration—in his own voice—to emphasize the artificiality of what he is doing.
   B. There are two ways in which Diderot thinks his kind of narration is closer to the truth than conventional novels are.

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1. One way is to reflect the incredible complexity of life, the confused jumble of experiences that empiricism recognized but that well-plotted stories try to simplify.
2. The other is to emphasize the subjectivity of the teller. Diderot never lets the reader forget that he is the one making this up.

C. This kind of metafiction casts doubt on the classical belief that art could show the coherence of the universe and teach moral lessons.
1. Sterne had a religious faith that helped him to believe that beneath apparent randomness, there was an underlying order.
2. Diderot, a skeptic, suggests that the desire to find meaningful order is a familiar human need but that we have no evidence that it actually exists.
3. Overlapping or repetitive stories illustrate our yearning for patterns that may not exist or may not mean anything even if they do exist.

D. At one point, Jacques tells about a friend of his former captain who fought repeated duels with another army officer, a story that curiously mirrors a similar story concerning two other people.
1. Jacques launches into his narrative, with constant reminders that the two stories of the duelists are really one and the same.
2. Diderot is suggesting that there is no reason to assume that everything that happens to us is unique.
3. He makes two points: that life, in general, is repetitive and that we all share a tendency to tell interesting stories that arrange material within an intelligible structure.

III. Diderot’s implicit psychology is empiricist and behaviorist.
A. Most people are like automata, acting through habit in predictable ways.
B. When people act according to motives of which they are unaware, this doesn’t mean that each person has a hidden unconscious, but only that stimuli from the surrounding culture are influencing them from outside.
C. But there is nothing gloomy about this picture, which is presented with humor and wit: Humans are inveterate storytellers; they compete with each other to tell their own stories; and they get pleasure from doing so.
D. According to Diderot, we need to stop thinking about stories as pictures of reality (the old classical way) and start thinking of them as expressive—as instruments that people use to influence and impress each other.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Is artistic realism an achievable goal, or is each generation’s realism bound to seem artificial and old-fashioned to the next generations?
2. Is a behaviorist account of human motivation incompatible with the idea of an unconscious?
Lecture Fourteen

Jacques the Fatalist, II

Scope: As the novel advances, we start to get some “real” stories, notably the narrative about Mme. de la Pommeraye who tricks her unfaithful lover into marrying a prostitute, but Diderot continues to question our desire for satisfyingly coherent tales and emphasizes the conventionality of love stories in particular. The fatalism of his title refers to the idea that everything is determined by an unbreakable chain of causes, but as Diderot also acknowledges, human beings cannot help believing in freedom. Jacques the Fatalist remarkably anticipates 20th-century modernism, stressing the artificiality of any attempt to represent reality in language and the impossibility of knowing whether other people’s words can be a trustworthy guide to their inner selves, if indeed they have any.

Outline

I. The story of Mme. de la Pommeraye and the Marquis des Arcis is a kind of novella embedded in Jacques the Fatalist.

A. It is a story being narrated and heard by the characters in the book, rather than an objective picture of reality.
   1. It is told by the hostess of an inn, whose motives for telling it aren’t clear, and with frequent interruptions by her employees.
   2. Hume claimed that people in conversation are completely open to each other, but Diderot is very skeptical about that, and the characters’ reflections on the story’s meaning show how far they are from fully understanding each other.

B. The story shows that hypocrisy can convincingly simulate sincerity and that people can be manipulated into having “true” feelings.
   1. Suspecting that her lover’s passion has waned, Mme. de la Pommeraye claims that the same thing has happened to her, which provokes Des Arcis to admit the change—but in actuality, her passion is as strong as ever, and what he takes to be her sincerity is the very opposite.
   2. She then orchestrates a plot in which he falls in love with a beautiful woman and marries her, only to discover that she is a prostitute in Mme. de la Pommeraye’s pay.
   3. Instead of reacting with despair as Mme. de la Pommeraye expected, Des Arcis realizes that he and his new wife truly love each other.

C. The meaning of the story will differ according to the subjective views of whoever is interpreting it.
   1. The hostess identifies with the injured woman and relishes her revenge, whereas Jacques is appalled at her cruelty; each reader will likewise interpret the story from a subjective point of view.
   2. Diderot is suggesting that there are aspects of experience that can’t be fully shared because we can’t imagine ourselves as someone other than who we are.
   3. In understanding that fiction is interpreted by each reader from his or her own personal viewpoint, Diderot is in conflict with empiricism, which stressed objectivity, defining what we have in common as social beings.
   4. One possible interpretation is to say that role-playing may not be incompatible with sincerity: Des Arcis’s feelings of love are genuine, not false, even though he was manipulated into having them; likewise, his wife really loves him, even though she had been paid to pretend to love him.
   5. Novels often reveal the overlapping languages that people speak, described by Mikhail Bakhtin, a 20th-century Russian theorist, as heteroglossia; Diderot keeps this very much in the foreground.
   6. Diderot also highlights the conventionality of readers’ enthusiasm for love stories.

II. Jacques the Fatalist explores the paradoxes of fatalism and determinism.

A. Fatalism implies that all human actions are already scripted in what Jacques calls the “great scroll up above.”
   1. What makes Mme. de la Pommeraye especially interesting is her attempt to control her story rather than submit to it.
2. She is trying to enact destiny because she knows the people involved, and because she has power, she can manipulate cause and effect successfully.

**B.** It is Diderot himself who is unrolling the scroll.

1. This is one of the ways that *Jacques the Fatalist* anticipates 20th-century modernism.
2. For people who can no longer believe in a source of ultimate meaning in the universe, works of art can create form and meaning out of the incomprehensibility of experience.

**C.** Determinism, a more modern theory, sees all events as deriving from antecedent causes but is open to an idea of randomness rather than purposiveness, which makes value and meaning extremely problematic.

**D.** Subjectively, however, people can’t help feeling free, even if their theories tell them they are not, and Diderot dramatizes both sides of this paradox.

**III.** This novel reflects the Enlightenment concern with social relations.

**A.** Jacques and his master act out the perennial master/servant relationship, which exists as an unwritten social contract, in a symbiotic connection in which each one has power over the other.

**B.** The dilemma for Enlightenment thought was to reconcile the yearning for authenticity with the suspicion that society not only controls people’s behavior but actively encourages them to exploit each other selfishly.

**Suggested Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Is it possible to really believe in a determinism that is truly random and lacks all purpose or meaning?
2. Is the experience of falling in love a fundamental human truth or a socially shaped convention?
Lecture Fifteen
Rousseau, *Inequality* and *Social Contract*

**Scope:** This lecture begins a series of four on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the greatest original genius of the Enlightenment. Rousseau agrees with the view of Hume and Diderot that inauthenticity is inseparable from human life as we know it, but refuses to accept it as natural, with the essentially conservative conclusions that Enlightenment *philosophes* drew. The *Discourse on Inequality* is an anthropological thought experiment that attempts to discover what would be truly natural to human beings if they had not been reshaped by society. Continuing this approach, *The Social Contract* explores the implicit assumptions that hold any society together. We can never go back to the precivilized state, but we can try to legitimate our chains by uniting in a “general will” that overcomes individual selfishness. Rousseau’s view of human nature is much closer to Hobbes and Pascal than to that of his Enlightenment colleagues, but unlike the older writers, he imagines a deeper “natural” self with which we can get back in touch.

**Outline**

I. The dilemma of empiricism was that it seemed to leave each individual trapped in his own private subjectivity. Rousseau’s answer to this dilemma was to consider that, perhaps, we do have an authentic self that has been covered over and distorted by a lifetime of social conditioning.

II. The *Discourse on Inequality* advances a new solution to the problem of the self, in contrast to the usual view of the Enlightenment *philosophes*.

   A. In a previous essay on the progress of the arts and sciences, Rousseau had argued that even though civilization brings much that is good, it is also destructive.

   B. In the *Inequality* discourse, he performs an anthropological thought experiment to imagine a primitive state before civilization began.

      1. Rousseau’s re-imagining of the foundations of the self is actually a rethinking of the whole question of self and society. It is full of paradoxes that are, in reality, antinomies, perceptions that are felt to be contradictory but also are felt to be both true.

      2. Rousseau doesn’t claim to be sure of what actually happened; instead, he wants to deduce what human beings would be like if we could delete everything that civilization has made them be.

      3. He asks: What if law is a tool of oppressive power, rather than its opposite?

      4. His goal is, thus, to bypass history and arrive at an understanding of the fundamental nature of man.

      5. His fundamental claim is that our true self is a solitary, presocial one, although he holds out the possibility that we may still have a true natural self, somewhere deep down, if we can learn to get back in touch with it.

   C. Rousseau’s picture of “natural man” gives new answers to the problems his contemporaries were addressing and can be called the *autocritique* of the Enlightenment, questioning its assumptions from within. The only fundamental principles are self-love and compassion (*pitié*).

      1. Whereas *amour-propre*, or “self-love,” had been given a positive turn by the *philosophes*, Rousseau distinguishes between socially oriented *amour-propre*, which generates inauthentic behavior, and a more fundamental *amour de soi*, or “love of self,” that reflects healthy self-preservation.

      2. Natural man (and natural woman, who was fully his equal) were essentially independent, coming together only occasionally and free from competition and jealousy.

      3. Once the family was instituted, it gave rise to feelings whose sweetness Rousseau acknowledges but also to the possibility of dominating others.

      4. Once larger groups began to gather in villages, people valued themselves by the effect they produced on others; the successful ones felt pride and contempt, and the unsuccessful ones felt resentment and shame.

      5. The development of agriculture and metallurgy led to the division of labor and to political systems that were able to enforce the built-in inequality that ensued.

      6. Rousseau’s main interest here isn’t political; he is trying to understand what we lost within ourselves when we sold out our natural freedom for the temptations of civilization.
7. “To be” and “to appear” became different things, and people came to see themselves only as others saw them.

D. It is not possible to return to the precivilized state, but Rousseau believes that there are important things to be learned from the thought experiment of the Discourse.
   1. We need to live according to feeling. Spontaneity becomes the chief virtue and authenticity, an end in itself.
   2. We should try to live “within ourselves” instead of “outside ourselves” (controlled by the opinions of other people). This represents a big break with empiricism, which saw living outside yourself as not only unavoidable but good for you.

III. The Social Contract extends Rousseau’s theory to political realities.
   A. We need to understand what is necessary if any system of government whatsoever is to be legitimate.
      1. The social contract must be a shared understanding on the part of all the people, not a historical event in the past. It exists right now, in the present moment, as the implicit understanding without which no system of society—let alone of government—can be legitimate.
      2. No society can ever get rid of the chains of inequality because, according to Rousseau, inequality is inseparable from social existence itself. It was Rousseau, in fact, more than anyone, who made inequality central to modern political and social thought.
      3. The solution, therefore, must be to make each individual feel wholeheartedly that he or she concurs with the will of the whole, a “common self,” or moi commun, in which everyone participates.
   B. Rousseau’s theory differs markedly from the usual Enlightenment ones.
      1. The social contract of Locke was an agreement by independent individuals to establish certain rules for mutual benefit.
      2. Rousseau (following Hobbes) believes that Locke’s theory fails to acknowledge the human desire for power and domination and that power will always be abused.
      3. In Rousseau’s social contract theory, each individual must be able to concur with the will of the whole, and any who refuse should be “forced to be free.”
      4. Such a theory may seem to anticipate modern totalitarianism, but Rousseau limited his model to small city-states where everyone would indeed share in decisions and would be free to leave if they chose.
      5. At bottom, he was addressing the fundamental problem of power and trying to find a way for each person to share in power instead of just submitting to it.
   C. Rousseau speaks for the side of modern experience that has profound doubts about individualism and yearns for a way of belonging to a larger whole. He puts forward a hardheaded analysis of the ways in which human beings are socially conditioned, which commits him to studying how they develop over time, as we will see in his autobiography.

Suggested Reading:
Mark Hulliung, The Autocritique of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, A Discourse on Inequality, trans. Maurice Cranston.
Robert Wokler, Rousseau.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is it conceivable that even the most primitive humans ever lived apart from social groups, and if not, is Rousseau’s theory fatally damaged?
2. Is Rousseau right to claim that even after being shaped by civilization, we can learn to recover an authentic mode of being and live “within ourselves”?
Lecture Sixteen

Rousseau, *The Confessions*, I

**Scope:** This lecture introduces a masterpiece whose influence on subsequent autobiography, and on our understanding of the self more generally, has been incalculable. In contrast to the empiricist model that traced the self through reactions to outside influences, Rousseau sought to recover the meaning of certain crucial experiences that had continued to haunt his memory. He devotes far more space to early childhood than any previous writer had done and focuses on specific events, in themselves relatively trivial, that reveal fundamental patterns in his psychic life: a spanking in childhood, with later repercussions that suggest an erotic pattern; an undeserved punishment for a broken comb; a stolen ribbon for which he succeeded in accusing an innocent fellow servant. Modern modes of analysis can help to clarify what Rousseau found obscure in these episodes, but it was he who first showed that such experiences could have great value in understanding the self.

**Outline**

I. Rousseau began to write the *Confessions* to assert his personal integrity and came to see the work as an account of how he became the person who wrote the books that he did.

A. During the early 1760s, he had published three masterpieces—*Julie, Émile*, and *The Social Contract*—which stirred up controversy and provoked attacks on his character and motives.
   1. Progressive thinkers felt he had sold out by denying that progress in civilization was good for the human race.
   2. Political and religious conservatives thought he was too critical of established doctrines and practices.

B. Rousseau was born into an artisan’s family in Geneva in 1712; in including scenes from his boyhood in the *Confessions*, he placed an emphasis on early experience that was utterly new.
   1. He never went to school in his life but was taught to read and write at home.
   2. In his early teens, he was apprenticed to an engraver but hated it and ran away, at age 16, to Turin in northern Italy.
   3. He spent the next 20 years working at odd jobs while giving himself a highly independent self-education.

C. He borrowed Saint Augustine’s title for his autobiography, but whereas Augustine presented himself as a typical sinner, Rousseau asserted his own uniqueness.

II. Rousseau was fully aware of the elements of role-playing in his life, but unlike the *philosophes*, he regarded role-playing as the problem not the solution. The most memorable episodes in the *Confessions* are narrated because they are atypical, even disturbing, yet filled with potential for understanding his personality.

A. He finds relations with women particularly revealing as he strives to interpret his own behavior and sees emotional and erotic relationships as absolutely central to who he is.
   1. A spanking in boyhood (something that previous autobiographers would never have described at all) is shown to have inaugurated an erotic pattern of desire and taboo that would be repeated many times in later life.
   2. Rousseau’s sexual inhibition with his surrogate mother, Mme. de Warens, and his sense of freedom in an encounter with a woman he met on a journey, likewise illustrate recurrent patterns.
   3. In a passionate (but unconsummated) flirtation years later, with the mistress of one of his friends, Rousseau recognizes clearly that he projected onto her the qualities he had been fantasizing about in his novel *Julie*.

B. If we think about all of these examples together, we can see what Rousseau’s theory of human behavior took as its fundamental premise: Everything we do or think is mirrored from other people. Our feelings are totally mediated— influenced by other people—and, indeed, social experience conditions us to be attracted to certain kinds of people and to relate to them in certain ways.

C. Two incidents of guilt and punishment are seen as being parallel at a deep level.
   1. As a boy, Rousseau was beaten for damaging a comb that he is certain he never touched; this injustice made him aware that appearances can be misleading and one’s true nature unseen by others.
2. As a teenage servant, he stole a ribbon but successfully accused an innocent fellow servant of having done it, reversing the episode of the comb; this time, he appeared innocent even though he was actually guilty.

3. Modern psychoanalytic insights can throw further light on possible unconscious motives that Rousseau didn’t understand (that is, it is our hidden, repressed impulses that drive us), and indeed, it was his new mode of interpreting behavior that would pave the way for psychoanalysis.

**Suggested Reading:**


Peter France, *Rousseau: Confessions*.

Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau’s Exemplary Life: The Confessions as Political Philosophy*.


———, *Émile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom.


**Questions to Consider:**

1. Are childhood experiences indeed formative of personality, or have we been encouraged (for instance, by psychoanalysis) to place more weight on them than they deserve?

2. Is it appropriate to discern unconscious motivations in incidents that are recounted by someone who lived two centuries ago?
Lecture Seventeen

The Confessions, II

Scope: This lecture shows that the episodes recounted in Confessions implicitly confirm Rousseau’s theory of natural man and his deformation by civilization. In numerous ways, he put forward a critique of the assumptions of empiricism, with respect to particularity and generality, the self and memory, and the value of the imagination. Rousseau’s relationship with Mme. de Warens, especially the time spent at Les Charmettes, is discussed to illustrate the way he imaginatively recreated the past. The lecture concludes by describing Rousseau’s realization that his career as a famous philosopher had been a wrong turning and his decision to drop out.

Outline

I. Rousseau’s larger theory can be seen underlying the various episodes recounted in the Confessions.
   A. The key is Rousseau’s conception of “natural man.” Man is naturally good, but society has made him vicious.
      1. Whereas the philosophes loved the give-and-take of conversation and argument, Rousseau believes that he can understand and express himself best if he avoids society and explains himself in writing.
      2. Following his example, each of us can potentially get in touch with a natural self that is deep inside, more fundamental than the distortions that society has imposed.
   B. Rousseau’s thinking implies a critique of empiricist assumptions. In inventing a new way of understanding the self, he paved the way for the great movement known as Romanticism.
      1. Empiricism said that only particulars are real, yet it attempted to define general truths about human nature; Rousseau emphasizes the particularity of each individual’s experience.
      2. Empiricism based all knowledge of the self on the connected data of memory; Rousseau focused on certain crucial moments that live on in the mind and reveal important personality patterns.
      3. Empiricism denigrated the imagination; Rousseau saw the imagination as the faculty that recreates the past and makes it meaningful, and he saw fantasy not as dangerous escapism but as a valuable refuge from life’s painfulness.
      4. For Rousseau, as for Romanticism after him, imagination and truth aren’t opposites; truth becomes real only when it is animated by imagination.
      5. Empiricism encouraged us to see ourselves as others see us; Rousseau tells us to stop seeing ourselves as others see us.

II. The account of life with Mme. de Warens illustrates the imaginative recreation of the past.
   A. Modern readers tend to concentrate on Rousseau’s conflicted erotic feelings toward Mme. de Warens, but her main importance in his life was in believing in him and helping him to believe in himself.
   B. In his highly poetic account of life at their country retreat, Les Charmettes, Rousseau describes an atmosphere of continuous happiness that made idleness a positive value.
      1. Once again, Rousseau gives the opposite of received wisdom. For him, social interaction tends to be filled with self-promotion and rivalry, and work is always joyless unless one has chosen it for oneself.
      2. He coined his own phrase, le sentiment de l’existence, the “feeling of existence,” to describe when we are fully ourselves, completely at home in the present moment.
   C. We know from other sources that, in fact, he was much lonelier during that period than he acknowledges in the Confessions, but what he is giving us is an imaginative understanding of what it meant to him at its best.

III. We can now understand why Rousseau deliberately chose to stop being a philosophe.
   A. He describes a thrilling conversion experience when he realized that he wanted to compete for the essay prize that became the first Discourse.
   B. He relished the fame that followed and the role he then played of the stern critic of modern civilization.
   C. But he came to see that it was a role and that by drawing him into social competition, it had caused him to betray his true nature; realizing this, he decided to drop out.
Suggested Reading:
See suggested titles for Lecture Sixteen.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is Rousseau’s defense of fantasy an attempt to compensate for his own social alienation or an insight into something that all persons do and need to do?
2. If, as scholars tell us, Rousseau was actually unhappy much of the time at Les Charmettes, to what extent is the value of his account in the Confessions compromised?
Lecture Eighteen

Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*

**Scope:** This lecture begins by describing Rousseau’s criticism of theatrical acting as an aspect of his rejection of social role-playing. His flight from official persecution and drift into paranoia are then discussed, followed by an account of the happier life he achieved after withdrawing from social competition. His final work, the *Reveries*, moves away from connected narrative and offers a series of interconnected meditations. Most impressive of all is the eloquent description of surrendering to the breeze and gentle waves of a Swiss lake, producing a liberation from self-concern. Detaching himself from society, Rousseau invokes nature as his god-term and becomes a major contributor to the current of thought later known as Romanticism, in which human beings receive spiritual sustenance from external phenomena. But the negativity of his solution also needs to be recognized as we prepare to revisit the activist Enlightenment.

**Outline**

I. Rousseau’s *Letter to d’Alembert on the Theater* crystallizes his rejection of social role-playing.
   A. D’Alembert had written in support of a project by Voltaire to start a theater in Geneva, which had always forbidden it.
   B. Rousseau not only defended the supposed simplicity of Genevan life but denounced actors as virtual prostitutes who sell themselves for money and simulate feelings that they don’t really have.

II. Rousseau became the object of official surveillance and persecution.
   A. *The Social Contract* and *Émile* were publicly burned, and Rousseau had to flee France to avoid arrest; in addition, the shameful fact that he had abandoned his five children to a foundling home became public knowledge.
   B. Alarmed by these events, he became increasingly paranoid, believing that old friends were betraying him and that a massive plot was being orchestrated against him.
   C. But far from ruining his life, this delusion freed him to withdraw from competitive life and seek to live “within himself” in a state of productive idleness.

III. The *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* embody the insights of his final years.
   A. Rousseau had always liked to wander in the fields and woods, and he now took up, in earnest, the study of botany.
      1. He chose botany because it allowed him to appreciate the richness of nature with no personal advantage in view.
      2. He was simply mastering a body of knowledge for its own sake, with no obligation to be an expert or even remember all that he learned.
      3. Unlike the *Confessions*, the *Reveries* were not an attempt to narrate the past but to reflect on the meaning of his own experience.
   B. Rejecting the narrative mode of self-understanding that he had developed in the *Confessions*, he seeks to recreate certain moments of contemplative insight that he calls “daydreams” or “reveries.”
      1. He now realizes that the effort of abstract thinking, even though he had accomplished it so well, was foreign to his temperament.
      2. He now understands that instead of trying to narrate the past in veracious detail, he needs to understand why certain intense experiences continue to live in his imagination.
   C. During a brief stay on a little island in a Swiss lake, Rousseau experiences a feeling of wholeness that looks forward to Romanticism, with its perception of nature as a god-term, or source of moral value; one can say also that for Rousseau, nature is a mother who will never let him down.
   D. An incident in Paris, when Rousseau was knocked unconscious in a street accident, confirms a very un-empiricist idea of the self.
      1. He is unaware of his separate individuality and feels united with everything around him, in an almost mystical sense.

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2. The empiricist self was defined by memory, but at this moment, Rousseau has no memory of his past at all.

IV. Rousseau’s achievement was extraordinary, but to some extent, it was negative.
   A. He laid the foundation for a new concept of personality and gave an explanation for feelings of dividedness and alienation.
   B. He gave people a new way to think about childhood, by considering how one might try to bring up a child according to his natural bent and by recounting his own childhood, thus showing how formative experiences shaped the person he became.
   C. His solution, in the end, was to drop out and, rather than trying to do what he wanted, to settle for not doing what he didn’t want.
   D. The activist, other-directed side of the Enlightenment deserves to be heard from again.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Does the American tradition of “method acting” throw doubt on the assumption, shared by both Diderot and Rousseau, that the emotions represented by actors are entirely artificial and insincere?
2. Is Rousseau’s account of oneness with nature a “natural” condition that everyone can and should attain or a religious faith in disguise?
Lecture Nineteen
Franklin, Autobiography

Scope: This lecture turns away from the introspective approach the course has been following to emphasize the idea that the mainstream of Enlightenment thought remained resolutely outward-directed. With Benjamin Franklin, we return to the optimism, practicality, and sociability of the empiricist model that has continued to influence our culture to this day, albeit with an admixture in modern times of therapeutic introspection. Franklin’s autobiography shows how he deliberately shaped his character into an amazingly effective public persona; he embodies the American ideal of being well adjusted and, in his own time, was seen as the quintessential American. Unlike Rousseau, he has no interest in telling us about his inner life, and from a modern perspective, he is a perfect illustration of Max Weber’s thesis about the secularization of the religious “calling.”

Outline

I. Literary theorists are drawn to psychoanalysis and the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” but academic psychology, which prefers the experimental study of people in groups, is much closer to Enlightenment empiricism in its assumptions.

II. In temperament and intellectual style, Franklin was a model man of the Enlightenment. Whereas Rousseau represents the autocritique of the Enlightenment, exposing some of its weaknesses, Franklin represents the positive achievement of the Enlightenment, embodying its strengths.

A. He was a well-adjusted, gregarious person, and unlike most of the writers studied in this course, he put his best energy into active life rather than writing.
   1. He was a tireless inventor and organizer of public projects.
   2. He kept his inner life so well hidden that modern Franklin scholars admit that it is impossible to really know him.
   3. Nevertheless, his honesty and sense of humor were very real and served him well in his role as a facilitator for whom politics was a matter of negotiation and compromise.

B. Franklin’s work in science was very much part of his total achievement.
   1. He made important discoveries about electricity because, in true Enlightenment style, he was open-minded and experimental.
   2. Science mattered to him not as abstract theory, but as a technique for practical improvement.

C. In his role as representative American, however, Franklin differs from the “citizen of the world” ideal of the European Enlightenment.

III. Franklin’s Autobiography tells the story of his public persona.

A. It purports to be addressed to his son but tells us nothing about that son, including the fact of his illegitimate birth.

B. Franklin looks back on his life as a project that has turned out well, and he relates incidents that add up to an entirely positive picture. He deliberately shapes himself as if he were the subject of his own behaviorist experiment.
   1. If any errors or loose ends existed, they were relatively unimportant and could easily have been corrected in a “second edition.”
   2. As the youngest son of a youngest son (he was the youngest of seventeen children), he came into the world with a kind of charmed destiny.
   3. In later years, he developed a self-image of straightforward honesty, coupled with scientific eminence.

C. The account of Franklin’s boyhood can be interestingly contrasted with Rousseau’s in the Confessions.
   1. Like Rousseau, Franklin learned from a harsh apprenticeship to hate tyranny, but whereas Rousseau pondered the ways in which he had internalized self-destructive behavior, Franklin leaves it behind and takes charge of his own destiny.
2. Even a story about leading some other boys into a “scrape,” stealing some stones to build a little wharf for fishing, redounds entirely to Franklin’s credit as a natural leader and as someone able to learn from his mistakes.

3. Rousseau read the text of his own life to locate permanent wrong turnings. Franklin, on the other hand, sees his *Autobiography* not as a permanent text, but as a revisable project.

IV. Franklin exemplifies Max Weber’s thesis about the “Protestant ethic.” Weber argued that there was a close connection between Protestant attitudes about work and the emergence of capitalism in Europe.

   A. Reflecting the transition from New England Puritan to Yankee, Franklin is interested in worldly achievement, not spiritual salvation.
   
   B. To labor diligently becomes a true “calling” and a measure of one’s personal worth.
   
   C. It is a bad sign if you spend your money too freely or use it to indulge in pleasure.
   
   D. The capitalist is committed to rational calculation, with a willingness to defer rewards. He is acquisitive but also has plenty of self-discipline.

Suggested Reading:


Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*.


Questions to Consider:

1. Can Rousseau’s radical analysis of the moral basis of politics in *The Social Contract* be reconciled with Franklin’s pragmatic understanding of politics as the art of the possible?

2. Does Franklin’s brief account of boyhood suggest that he is leaving things out that would alter the picture, or does it testify convincingly to the kind of person he was?
Lecture Twenty
Franklin and Adam Smith

Scope: For Franklin, the public is the private, or at least the two should coincide as far as possible. When he describes relationships, he is mainly interested in being a facilitator in groups (reflecting the Enlightenment theme of separate individuals cooperating for common benefit); marriage is a policy decision; and an atmosphere of humorous tolerance covers over any frustrations he may actually have felt. This lecture also examines the psychological and economic writings of Adam Smith, which advance a powerful theoretical foundation for the values that Franklin exemplified in his life.

Outline

I. Franklin strove to construct a “character” that others would like and admire.
   A. Whereas Rousseau was a loner with a few intense relationships, Franklin was a team player, good at friendship but not given to passionate attachments.
   B. Unlike Rousseau, whatever happened to Franklin when he was out of the public eye was relatively marginal to his sense of who he was.
   C. Rather than being haunted by past failures, he regarded them as “errata” that can be erased and corrected.
      1. His marriage is a good example, correcting an earlier error by marrying a woman he had once jilted and triumphing over her initial impression of him as a bedraggled stranger just arriving in Philadelphia.
      2. Unlike Rousseau, who wanted to recover his true self by getting rid of the habits and behaviors that social life called for, Franklin wanted to acquire them. While still in his teens, Franklin devised a scheme for systematically improving in each of 13 “virtues,” treating himself like an experimental subject in science.
      3. Frugality, industry, and the rest of the virtues were focused on repudiating idleness (whereas Rousseau encouraged it) and on actively seeking to do good.

II. Franklin’s philosophy of life embodies Enlightenment principles.
   A. Nature is a reliable guide, not a sinful obstacle, and we should behave morally not to avoid punishment but to achieve desirable goals.
   B. Even though perfection is impossible for human beings, the failings of others should be regarded with humorous tolerance.
   C. Deliberately creating a favorable public image is not dishonest, because it is entirely appropriate to make our behavior correspond to the image others have of us.

III. Adam Smith gave a theoretical basis to the kinds of attitudes that Franklin represents. His two great works, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*, are two parts of a single conceptual project meant to develop a theoretical basis for the social implications of modern individualism and to show that competitive, free individuals participate in a great system that works to everyone’s benefit.
   A. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith argues that moral feelings are instinctive and natural.
   B. At the same time, however, human beings are totally separate individuals.
      1. We understand other people by hypothesizing how we would feel if we were in their position.
      2. Conversely, we understand ourselves by thinking of the self as an other; one should divide oneself (as Smith says) into the person who acts and the person who judges.
      3. Conservative thinkers, such as Samuel Johnson, felt that this philosophy of “moral sentiment” was really just a cover for selfishness.
   C. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith extended his analysis of individualism to the new discipline of economics, holding that if each individual strives to maximize his or her personal advantage, the result will be the good of the whole.
      1. The division of labor, in the emerging factory system, is seen as allowing workers to sell their labor freely to employers and as increasing productivity for the benefit of all.
2. For Smith, the old hierarchical society, with a few rich and noble people on the top and a huge number of virtual serfs down below, was a recipe for economic stagnation and widespread poverty.
3. At the same time, Smith regarded ceaseless work as a good in itself, and idleness (which Rousseau had praised) is condemned.
4. The new discipline of economics offered what was then a brand-new concept, “the economy,” as a way of conceptualizing and trying to control the big collective forces that shape our lives.

IV. The ideas that motivated Franklin and Smith have left a mixed legacy today.
   A. In its concern with public and social life, our culture honors their vision of self-discipline as a means to achieving shared goals.
   B. But with respect to our inner lives, Rousseau’s ideas continue to exert a major influence.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. If Franklin was genuinely (as seems to be the case) contented with his marriage, does that cast doubt on the idea of passionate love as the best guide for choosing a mate?
2. Does modern American society essentially follow the ideals put forward by Franklin and Smith?
Lecture Twenty-One
Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, I

Scope: This lecture introduces the most compelling and thought-provoking novel of the 18th century. Written in the epistolary mode as a series of letters, it makes the truth about human motives seem unknowable: Not only are most of the characters highly skilled at duplicity, but even their attempts at self-knowledge are doomed to failure. Most of the letters are exchanged between the rake Valmont and his former lover Merteuil, who taunt each other but also collude in the seduction of two innocent women. This novel implicitly rejects empiricist psychology as inadequate to explain human treachery and self-deception, reverting to something like the bleak aristocratic worldview of a century before. Merteuil asserts a self-created ethic of existential authenticity: By being at war with the entire human race, she hopes to escape social influence and make her own rules. Meanwhile Valmont’s victim, Tourvel, experiences genuine passion, but this proves totally destructive.

Outline

I. The epistolary mode is ideally suited to convey ambiguity. It gives an illusion of real-time immediacy, plus the voyeuristic thrill of peeking into other people’s secret lives.
   A. Earlier novels in letters, by Samuel Richardson and Rousseau, gave readers a secure moral standpoint; this one does not, going back to the 17th-century code of cynical worldliness.
   B. Laclos’s novel exploits the inherent ambiguity of letters.
      1. The letter writers may not be telling the truth, or they may be self-deceived even if they do intend to tell the truth.
      2. There is always a time lag between the writing of a letter and its reception, which encourages misunderstanding.
      3. Language is potentially misleading, especially when a writer uses deliberate double entendres.
      4. Lacking a narrator to guide our responses, we try in vain to see behind the letters, but these disparate texts are all that we are shown.

II. Power relationships are the only ones that matter to Valmont and Merteuil, the two chief characters.
   A. By profession, Laclos was a military engineer in charge of fortifications, which can serve as an apt metaphor for his characters’ view of life.
      1. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* represents a return to the 17th-century sense of the self as a fortress surrounded by defensive ramparts. Merteuil and Valmont work tirelessly to make their psychic fortifications as impregnable as possible.
      2. Laclos wrote the novel during a year he spent on a boring island off the west coast of France, while preparing its defenses for a British attack that never came.
   B. Valmont is reluctant to seduce an attractive young woman because it would be too easy; he targets the virtuous Présidente Tourvel because of the challenge involved.
   C. The one relationship that matters in this novel is the increasingly antagonistic one between Valmont and Merteuil.
   D. Valmont plays a standard libertine role, but Merteuil, who must keep her affairs secret because of the sexual double standard, has developed an original existential philosophy of her own.
      1. She has always been rational rather than passionate and aims for brief moments of pleasure rather than the blander ideal of happiness. In fact, this is the ideal of Enlightenment empiricism: to shape a consistent and rationally chosen character.
      2. She keeps herself isolated and ungiving, at war with the human race.
      3. She is highly skilled at role-playing, in a cold and selfish manner that exposes the inadequacy of the optimistic empiricist view of the self.
      4. Yet there is a sense in which she cannot avoid being enslaved to the men she treats as her slaves, because her calculated performance involves making them feel that they are getting what they desire.
      5. The story, up until now, is effectively combining the 17th-century view of human beings as self-centered rivals with the 18th-century view of humans as role players.
III. Valmont’s victim, Tourvel, is entirely different from the predators Valmont and Merteuil.
   A. She has a genuine religious faith and tries hard to be faithful to her dull absentee husband.
   B. She discovers that she is truly passionate, once her passion has been awakened, and she willingly transfers to Valmont the adoration she previously directed at God.

IV. The 18th-century faith in sentiment is cast into doubt by this novel.
   A. Valmont shows that he can sincerely experience “good” emotions that in no way contradict his fundamental viciousness.
   B. Given that emotions can be behavioristically stimulated, it is far from clear that they can serve as a guide to morality.

Suggested Reading:
Ronald Rosbottom, *Laclos.*

Questions to Consider:
1. Given the imaginative possibilities of epistolary fiction, why has it been attempted so rarely in modern times?
2. Does the traditional opposition between pleasure and happiness make sense, or should pleasure be seen as a contributor to happiness?
Lecture Twenty-Two

Les Liaisons Dangereuses, II

Scope: While Valmont likes to see his life as a comedy, his victim, Tourvel, pulls the story increasingly in the direction of tragedy. The Liaisons challenges us to find a moral perspective in a hermetically closed society, where power is the only value, but refuses to give us a place to stand and remains disturbingly ambiguous all the way down.

Outline

I. Tourvel’s experience moves Les Liaisons Dangereuses in the direction of tragedy.
   A. The story forces us to question why we enjoy artistic representations of suffering that would be horrible in real life.
      1. True tragedy has been confined to periods when traditional religious answers were being questioned but had not yet given way to skepticism.
      2. By the time when Laclos wrote, skepticism was indeed taking over, and Merteuil and Valmont act like gods in an amoral universe.
      3. This novel, as a whole, absolutely refuses to find meaning in suffering in the way classical tragedy did.
   B. Various subplots in the novel follow conventional comic lines, but are deflected into tragic outcomes.

II. Tourvel and Valmont are locked in a complex power relationship.
   A. In response to Tourvel’s passion, Valmont suspects that he is actually succumbing to love, but he forces himself to reject it because that would entail nothing less than mutual giving on both sides.
   B. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that Tourvel’s unconditional devotion does represent a kind of power over him, and Merteuil taunts him with this.
   C. At this point in the novel, we’re faced with questions that another kind of novel would answer: Is Valmont truly falling in love with Tourvel? Does Merteuil still care about him; is she motivated by jealousy? The novel refuses to answer these questions to force the reader to realize how crude and reductive these terms are.

III. Merteuil, too, betrays complicated and ambiguous emotions.
   A. It’s clear that Merteuil feels jealousy, but as Laclos presents it, that doesn’t necessarily give us the key to her motives and actions.
   B. As Merteuil analyzes the situation, Valmont has fallen in love with a projection of imagined qualities onto a woman who doesn’t actually have them.

IV. The situation is resolved when Valmont rejects Tourvel.
   A. Unwilling to appear weak in Merteuil’s eyes, Valmont transcribes a cold letter of rejection that Merteuil prepares for him.
   B. Far from being reconciled with each other, however, the two of them are now at war, which soon leads to Valmont’s death in a duel and Merteuil’s public disgrace.
      1. Merteuil comes down with smallpox and her good looks are devastated; her career as a seductress is over.
      2. She flees to Amsterdam with a quantity of jewels that will permit her to start a new life with a good financial nest egg.
      3. The question remains: Is smallpox poetic justice for Merteuil’s actions, or in viewing it as a moral sign, are we simply reacting in a conventional way?

V. Laclos has carefully concealed his own opinions, but it is possible to guess at them.
   A. He wrote an unpublished essay on female education, arguing that love and beauty are socially generated illusions and that women are taught to exert indirect power by manipulating men. What he shares most deeply with Rousseau seems to be a conviction that socialized human beings can never be “natural.”
B. It seems possible that he hoped readers would choose a moral perspective completely different from any contained in the novel.
C. The book is ambiguity all the way down, which is highly disconcerting because we are accustomed to art helping to liberate us from ambiguity.

VI. Recent filmed versions can help us to appreciate some of the things this novel does best.
A. It is my firm belief that it almost never works well to translate a novel into a movie.
   1. A movie has to be primarily visual, showing rather than telling.
   2. A movie has to give characters embodiment as flesh-and-blood actors, who may already be familiar from previous roles.
   3. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, there is a further problem: The epistolary method means you can never be sure what is true and what is false, but a movie has to show you.
B. *Dangerous Liaisons* makes casting choices that diminish the complexity of the characters and reduces the story to a simple jealousy plot, but it does achieve some superb cinematic effects.
C. *Valmont* represents its hero as a charming rogue whom women can’t help loving even when he breaks their hearts.

*Suggested Reading:*
See suggested titles for Lecture Twenty-One.

*Questions to Consider:*
1. Can the ending of a novel effectively “reward” or “punish” its characters, or does Merteuil’s fate suggest that moral and aesthetic considerations don’t necessarily coincide?
2. Is the language of cinema so different from the language of fiction that great novels are, by their very nature, not filmable?
Lecture Twenty-Three

Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

Scope: The final two lectures look back at the Enlightenment from the perspective of the Romantic movement that succeeded it, focusing on William Blake’s superbly imaginative works that brilliantly reconceive the central issues of this course, using visual art and symbolic poems to re-open the old questions in a highly original way. The challenge for Blake is to recover the depth of understanding that the religious tradition provided before the Enlightenment displaced it, while establishing conflict and energy as essential to human life rather than as threats to be subdued. The paired sequence *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* expresses the interaction between two complementary visions, a childlike sense of belonging in the world and a disillusioned awareness of the painful conflicts of adult experience.

Outline

I. Blake developed his own private mode of producing art.
   A. Having been trained as an engraver, he produced hand-printed books in which his poetic texts were integrated with pictures, hand-colored by Blake and his wife.
      1. These aren’t really “illustrations” but parallel modes of understanding.
      2. The pictures often seem strangely out of synch with the words, so that they force the reader to think harder about what is being given.
   B. These were intended to bypass the publishing industry and reach a wide audience, but in fact, Blake was barely known in his own time.
   C. Blake wanted his symbolic art to “rouse the faculties to act.”

II. “Mock On Mock On Voltaire Rousseau” serves as an introduction to Blake’s critique of the Enlightenment.
   A. Blake held that natural religion, or deism, had exposed errors in traditional religion but had forgotten the significance of spiritual experience.
      1. The Enlightenment *philosophes* blinded themselves with their reductive philosophy.
      2. Isaac Newton’s physics represents a similar reductiveness.
      3. Whereas the empiricists demoted imagination as mere fantasizing and aimed for expository clarity, Blake returned to a symbolic mode that asked questions instead of giving answers.
   B. In asserting the natural goodness of man, Rousseau blamed society rather than himself for his failings.

III. The *Songs of Innocence* presents a natural world in which the divine principle is ever-present and life-giving.
   A. One of its most powerful songs, “The Chimney Sweeper,” reflects Blake’s view of conventional religion as a weapon of social control.
   B. “The Lamb” helps children to identify with Jesus as the Good Shepherd.
   C. “Infant Joy” has a minimal text but a gorgeous picture that identifies vitality, including sexuality, with Mary, the mother of Jesus.
   D. Although Blake insists on a spiritual dimension of experience, he, like Enlightenment thinkers, believes in the value of this world, not waiting to escape to an otherworldly heaven after death.

IV. The *Songs of Experience* exposes the disillusioned knowledge of adult life.
   A. “The Clod and the Pebble” presents a sadomasochistic union that symbolizes two extreme aspects of love, total giving and total domination.
      1. The picture, however, shows a peaceful pastoral scene, suggesting that the obsessive psychodrama of the clod and pebble isn’t the whole story.
      2. Rather than thinking of the clod and pebble as two characters, they may well represent aspects that are both present in everyone.
      3. Blake’s concept of psychology will extend this notion of a dynamic of inner forces in each person.
      4. Two short poems, both containing the phrase “The lineaments of gratified desire,” pursue the paradoxes in the “Experience” view of love.
B. “The Tyger” presents an awesome God who shapes the tiger’s “fearful symmetry” with muscular force.
   1. Allusions to the rebellions of Satan and Prometheus are embedded in the poem, casting doubt on the authority of the majestic creator.
   2. Unlike “The Lamb,” this poem asks question after question and may well be intended to cast doubt on conventional belief in an omnipotent deity.
   3. The picture, surprisingly, shows a gentle pussycat, not a figure of dread, and likewise suggests that perhaps we haven’t learned to ask the right questions.

Suggested Reading:
Peter Ackroyd, Blake.
———, Songs of Innocence and of Experience, ed. Andrew Lincoln (color reproductions).
———, William Blake Archive (online texts and color reproductions).
Greg Brown, Songs of Innocence and of Experience (musical settings).
Leo Damrosch, Symbol and Truth in Blake’s Myth.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is Blake right to assert that Rousseau’s Confessions is an apology for his life rather than a confession?
2. Can the power and awe of “The Tyger” be reconciled with the picture of a mild and harmless feline?
Lecture Twenty-Four
Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Scope: The final lecture of the course examines *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, written in response to the excitement of the French Revolution, which uses a medley of genres to explore interrelated themes in psychology, politics, and religion. Opposing the conventional division between “good” and “evil,” Blake further develops his insight that energy and conflict are fundamental to human experience, calling for an imaginative renewal that might transcend the old dualisms of body/soul and body/mind. This philosophy is expressed in a series of challengingly original forms: biblical imitation, allusions to contemporary people and events, parodies of other writers, and the memorably unconventional “Proverbs of Hell.” With Blake, we take a retrospective view of what the Enlightenment achieved in understanding the self and of what it left undone.

Outline

I. The “marriage” in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* implies a union of contraries. It is a medley of incongruous forms: poetry and proverbs, allusions to contemporary people, parodies of other writers, and satiric narratives.

A. Blake opposes the hierarchical assumptions of traditional psychology, with reason on top and the passions below.
   1. He sees energy and conflict as fundamental to life. For Blake, official religion and political thought defined energy and conflict as wicked to make people passive and subservient.
   2. Reason should give form and definition to energy in dynamic interaction but should not oppose it.
      “Energy, “ says Blake, “is Eternal Delight.”

B. Blake trenchantly criticizes empiricism.
   1. The Enlightenment reduced philosophy to epistemology, the study of knowledge; Blake insists on a faculty of spiritual vision that transcends the empirical world.
   2. At the same time, he rejects (as the *philosophes* did) the religious prohibition of forbidden knowledge and calls for imaginative breakthrough in an individualized “Last Judgment.”
   3. Body and soul (or mind) are two aspects of the same thing, not opposites.
   4. Blake agrees with the older religious thinkers that human psychology is deeply conflicted, full of self-condemnation and self-repression, but unlike them, he encourages us to get beyond restrictive moral categories of good and evil.
   5. Infinity and eternity are not scientific abstractions but present here and now, if we can learn to perceive truly.

C. Blake also criticizes traditional religion.
   1. Milton’s theology, according to Blake, led him to reproduce a repressive belief system in *Paradise Lost*, but his poetic instincts made him rebel against tyranny in spite of his theology.
   2. The divine is a principle that exists in all persons.
   3. The “Proverbs of Hell” encourage us to question received ideas and to seek wisdom through excess, not moderation and restraint.

II. “London,” in the *Songs of Experience*, gives a condensed view of Blake’s thinking.

A. The picture for the poem “London,” unlike most of the others, is not a symbolic image but a naturalistic representation of the kind Blake almost never did.

B. In the poem, Blake sees people as accepting a dehumanizing and subservient life because they have internalized repression in the “mind-forg’d manacles,” the social forces that condition the self.

C. Blake gives three examples of abuses and oppression that flow from official social and political policy: the exploitation of child labor, the use of young soldiers to extend the British Empire, and the tacitly condoned institution of prostitution.
Blake’s crucial insight is that conflicts are built into our psychological nature, and when we project these conflicts outward, we produce a repressive social and political order. His message is extreme, and he wanted it to be: His goal is “to rouse the faculties to act.”

Suggested Reading:
See titles for Lecture Twenty-Three.

Questions to Consider:
1. If one cannot share Blake’s religious vision, does his critique of Enlightenment naturalism and materialism lose its force?
2. Do Blake’s references to chimney sweeps and prostitutes in “London” constitute an effective indictment of the way society works, or do they depend on political assumptions that are asserted rather than defended?
## Timeline

1637................................. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*
1649................................. Execution of King Charles I of England
1651................................. Hobbes, *Leviathan*
1660................................. The Restoration in England (Puritans ousted; Charles II returns from exile in France)
1664................................. La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*
1666................................. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*
1670................................. Pascal, *Pensées*
1677................................. Racine, *Phèdre*
1678................................. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*
                            Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves*
1685................................. Halifax, *A Character of King Charles II*
1688................................. The “Glorious Revolution,” in which Parliament deposed King James II without bloodshed and replaced him with William and Mary
1690................................. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
1715................................. Death of Louis XIV of France
1731................................. Voltaire, *History of Charles XII*
1733................................. Pope, *An Essay on Man*
1739................................. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*
1751................................. *Encyclopedia*, vol. I
1755................................. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*
1756................................. Start of the Seven Years’ War
                            Voltaire, *Poem on the Disaster at Lisbon*
1759................................. Voltaire, *Candide*
                            Johnson, *Rasselas*
                            Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*
1761................................. Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*
1762................................. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*
                            Rousseau, *Émile*
1760s................................. Diderot’s unpublished works begun and continued for many years (*Jacques the Fatalist* was not published until 1796 and *Rameau’s Nephew*, not until 1823)
1765................................. Rousseau, *Confessions* begun (pub. 1782)
1771................................. Franklin, *Autobiography* begun (pub. 1818)
1776................................. American Revolution
                            Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. I
                            Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*
                            Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (pub. 1782)
1779 ........................................................ Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*
                        Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
1782 ...................................................... Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*
1789 ........................................................ French Revolution
                        Blake, *Songs of Innocence*
1790 ........................................................ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (completed 1792)
1791 ........................................................ Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*
1794 ........................................................ Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*
Glossary

Amour-propre: “Self-love” in French, the sin of pride according to the religious tradition, and an innate selfishness according to 17th-century secular writers but rehabilitated in the Enlightenment as a natural and instinctive self-regard.

Calvinism: The theology of John Calvin (1509–1564) and his followers, a pessimistic doctrine of predestination in which some people are among the “elect,” chosen by God for salvation, but the great majority are “reprobate” and doomed to damnation despite anything they may do in their lives.

Character: On the analogy of printer’s characters that physically imprint marks on paper, a stable and coherent character was the classical psychological ideal and survived vigorously in the 18th century; the modern concept of personality was only just starting to develop.

Deism: Also known as natural religion, a belief that everything humans need to know about God can be deduced rationally from the phenomena of nature (thus rendering revelation and faith unnecessary); the deist God created the universe as a complex machine but may or may not take any further interest in it.

Determinism: A belief that everything happens inevitably in response to a succession of causes; in the 18th century, a strictly mechanical determinism was not always distinguished from fatalism, which implied some sort of meaning in the way events transpire.

Empiricism: The dominant philosophy of the 18th century, rejecting innate ideas and holding that all knowledge is of particular sense data, which the mind somehow recombines to form an understanding of itself and the world; empiricism was the enabling ideology of experimental science.

Enlightenment (in French, les lumières): An activist program of research and reform, centering on French thinkers known as philosophes (pragmatic critics of society and traditional dogmas rather than abstract philosophers), with the multivolume Encyclopedia as its centerpiece.

Fatalism: See determinism.

Jansenism: Somewhat like Protestant Calvinism, a strand of Catholic theology that emphasized human sinfulness and divine predestination.

Liberalism: The economic theory that competitive individualism, with each person striving to maximize his or her advantage, produces the greatest happiness for all; its descendant in modern America is known as conservatism.

Materialism: The doctrine that nothing exists in the universe except matter in motion and that all mental, emotional, and spiritual experience is a direct reflection of physical causes.

Melancholy: Originally conceived of as an imbalance of one of the four humors, the term was much broader than it is today and indicated obsessive mental imbalance or neurosis.

Natural religion: See deism.

Nature: In classical and medieval times, nature meant “everything that exists in the universe”; during the 18th century, it came to mean the world of mountains and forests apart from man and took on a quasi-religious role as a source of value and meaning.

Optimism: The philosophy associated with Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), who claimed that suffering could be explained and, indeed, justified as the necessary byproduct of a universe in which the totality is for the best, even if individuals may happen to suffer.

Original Sin: The Christian doctrine that when Adam and Eve, tempted by Satan but acting on their own free will, disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit of knowledge, they condemned their posterity to a life of sinfulness from which only divine grace could rescue them.

Passions: The fundamental emotions, traditionally understood to be (as the cognate word passive suggests) involuntary drives that ought to be held in check by reason; Enlightenment psychology found positive value in the passions.

Philosophes: See Enlightenment.
**Romanticism:** The Europe-wide movement that arose in reaction to Enlightenment empiricism; it took many different forms but tended to stress imaginative perception or intuition and a return to spiritual values that the Enlightenment had denigrated.

**Sentiment:** Emotion or feeling.
Biographical Notes

Aubrey, John (1626–1697). Collector of biographical anecdotes, which were published after his death as *Brief Lives of Eminent Men*.

Blake, William (1757–1827). Self-taught poet and artist who developed a highly original myth that embodied profound criticism of Enlightenment thinking.

Boswell, James (1740–1795). Scottish lawyer, author of richly detailed diaries that were unpublished until the 20th century and of the classic *Life of Samuel Johnson*.

Bunyan, John (1628–1688). Baptist preacher who wrote the classic *Pilgrim’s Progress* while imprisoned for refusing to give up preaching.

Descartes, René (1596–1650). Mathematician and philosopher, author of the *Discourse on Method*, which sought to ground all knowledge in the fundamental intuition “I think, therefore I am.”

Diderot, Denis (1713–1784). Central figure in the French Enlightenment; edited the great *Encyclopedia* and produced successful plays but is best known today for unpublished works, such as *Jacques the Fatalist* and *Rameau’s Nephew*.

Franklin, Benjamin (1705–1790). American printer, scientist, and statesman, who left Boston in his teens to become a leading figure in Philadelphia; made important contributions to the study of electricity; and after the American Revolution, became one of the most admired of the Founding Fathers. Author of an *Autobiography* not published until the 19th century.

Gibbon, Edward (1737–1794). Reclusive writer (though he served for a few years in Parliament); author of the great history *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and of an *Autobiography* that was published after his death.

Halifax, George Savile, first Marquess of (1633–1695). Statesman who promoted tolerance and parliamentary sovereignty; author of a trenchant memoir of King Charles II.


Hume, David (1711–1776). Scottish philosopher and historian whose *Treatise of Human Nature* and other works are the definitive expressions of empiricist thought.

Johnson, Samuel (1709–1784). Scholar, critic, and essayist who dominated London literary life in the second half of the 18th century; among his works are the first major edition of Shakespeare, the first comprehensive English dictionary, and a set of critical biographies, *The Lives of the English Poets*.

Laclos, Choderlos de (1741–1803). Army officer whose *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* is a masterpiece of French fiction; in later years, he served as a general under Napoleon.

Lafayette, Marie-Madeleine de (1634–1693). Hostess of an influential salon in the court of Louis XIV and author of several works of fiction, most notably *La Princesse de Clèves*.

La Rochefoucauld, François, Duc de (1613–1680). Military officer who became a central figure in the intellectual life of Louis XIV’s court; author of the epigrammatic *Maximes* on human behavior.

Locke, John (1632–1704). Physician and philosopher whose *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was a formative text in British empiricism and whose *Two Treatises on Government* was an important defense of parliamentary supremacy over the monarchy.

Pascal, Blaise (1623–1662). Mathematician and religious thinker, closely connected to the Jansenist movement, whose *Pensées (“Thoughts”)* is a classic of religious writing.

Pope, Alexander (1688–1744). The leading English poet of the 18th century; author of social satires and of *An Essay on Man*. 

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Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1712–1778). Geneva-born musician, novelist, and theorist; author of *A Discourse on Inequality* and *The Social Contract* (classics of social thought), *Émile* (a groundbreaking treatise on education), *Julie* (the bestselling novel of the 18th century) and *Confessions* (one of the most important autobiographies ever written).

Smith, Adam (1723–1790). Professor at the University of Glasgow; author of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which proposed a psychological basis for modern individualism, and *The Wealth of Nations*, a classic of economics.

Voltaire (1694–1778). Born François-Marie Arouet, a playwright, poet, and tireless propagandist for the Enlightenment program of intellectual and social reform; among his scores of works is the classic satire *Candide*. 
Bibliography

Primary Sources:

These are the basic texts for the course, in excellent modern editions and translations (passages quoted from French in the lectures, however, are my own translations). All are available in paperback and have good critical and historical introductions.

For those who would like to read the French texts in the original, excellent modern editions are available in most of the major paperback series: Éditions Garnier, Garnier Flammarion, Gallimard Folio Classique, Livres de Poche, and so on. I have noted below one exceptionally valuable hardbound edition, the Oeuvres Completes of Rousseau in the Pléiade series.


———. *William Blake Archive*. A magnificent Web site at the University of Virginia, constantly being enlarged, offering the complete text of Blake’s works and superb color reproductions of his “illuminated books” (http://www.blakearchive.org/main.html).


———. *My Own Life*, reprinted in various collections of his work, such as *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987). A brief and curiously dispassionate overview of Hume’s life as he saw it at the very end.


———. *A Discourse on Inequality*, trans. Maurice Cranston (New York: Penguin, 1984). Excellent translation and introduction by a political scientist who was also Rousseau’s most recent biographer.


Secondary Sources:

There are innumerable studies, many of them very valuable, on the various aspects of cultural and literary history covered in this course. The following list is confined to selected works that avoid undue specialization and will engage the interest of the general reader; all of them are mentioned in the “Suggested Reading” sections of the lecture outlines.


Ackroyd, Peter. *Blake* (New York: Knopf, 1996). An excellent biography, which gives a good sense of Blake’s art and thought, as well as recounting his life.


Martin, Peter. *A Life of James Boswell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). A good overview of Boswell’s life, including the later years that Pottle’s biography didn’t reach.


Morgan, Edmund S. *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Briefer than the Brands biography and focused on episodes in Franklin’s life that throw light on his personality.


