

**Rousseau**  
Politics 729  
Wednesday 3:00–6:00, Kendall 421  
Spring 2017, Hillsdale College

Matthew D. Mendham, Ph.D.  
mmendham@hillsdale.edu  
Office phone: 517-607-2724

Office: Kendall 406  
Office hours: Monday 2:30-5:00,  
Wednesday 9:00-10:30, Thursday 1:00-2:00

**Course Description**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) is one of the most influential political philosophers, and is perhaps rivalled only by Plato in mysteriousness and controversy. To his many admirers across the centuries, he is seen as the most eloquent champion of virtue, liberty, justice, equality, democracy, sincerity, or compassion—in many combinations. To his many detractors, his eloquence proved to be a scourge to the rest of us, generating anarchism, socialism, authoritarianism, ‘totalitarian democracy,’ narcissism, or an irrationalist ethics of feeling—again in many combinations. Although Rousseau often condemned revolution and normally saw France as a lost cause, he also profoundly discredited the political and religious institutions of old regime Europe, and his thought is normally seen as playing a uniquely powerful role in the French Revolution (1789–1799).

Since they are often covered in other courses, we pass over his most formal works of political philosophy, the *Discourse on Inequality* and the *Social Contract*. Of the major works that remain, his leading concern is the formation of human character—the conditions needed for virtue and liberty, and the grotesque failures of most societies to attain these. Although in some ways a child of Enlightenment, Rousseau catapulted himself into prominence by condemning the proliferation of higher learning in the modern world, and ended up breaking decisively with the *philosophes* over their enthusiasm for high Parisian society and the theatre. Following his earlier and more polemical writings, we turn to the one he described as his best: *Emile, or On Education*. Extending far beyond pedagogy narrowly understood, it provides his fullest statement of the good human life, from economic self-sufficiency and moral autonomy to sexuality and citizenship. *Emile* and the *Social Contract* were burned, and their author exiled, across much of Europe. We conclude with some of Rousseau’s later autobiographical writings: Did he deserve his persecution? Did he live the life of wholeness he sought, even after his exiles? Does his own experience support his philosophy of the natural goodness of humanity?

**Required Texts**

Bring a hard copy of the assigned reading to each class. Additional readings are posted on Blackboard.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*. Ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. ISBN: 0521424453.

---. *Emile, or On Education*. Trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1979. ISBN: 0465019315.

---. *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Trans. Russell Goulbourne. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 0199563276.

## Course Requirements and Grading

**Attendance, Attention, and Participation (10% of final grade).** As a seminar, this course is designed above all to develop skills of rational, constructive discussion and debate. Accordingly, although there are no exams or quizzes, it will be especially important for you to attend class consistently. You will be expected to be well-prepared for every class and to participate regularly. You may be called upon at any point to provide an informed perspective on the topic being discussed, or to offer one of your prepared Discussion Questions.

**Discussion Questions (10% of final grade).** Before each class, write out 3-4 sentences with some combination of observations and questions about the reading, which would be appropriate to spark class discussion. Precision and subtlety are important; normally pages should be cited. Your prepared comments may be collected at the beginning of any class period.

**Review Essay (10% of final grade).** Select one option from our list of scholarly interpretations. In 4-5 pages, summarize and analyze the core theses and evidence presented by your source(s), on the model of a longer scholarly book review. Be sure to cite page numbers, not only for quotations but for most of your specific claims. The main goal is to provide a reliable entry point for other students to consider turning to this source. *Your essay must be sent to the professor, by email attachment, at least 24 hours before the beginning of the class period when you will make your Review Presentation.* It will soon be posted to Blackboard for the benefit of your fellow students.

**Review Presentation (10% of final grade).** Based on the same source(s) as your Review Essay, present some of the core arguments and observations to the class. You are not likely to be able to provide a comprehensive summary; the main goal is to point to a few of the most important and interesting claims, in order to draw students to your Review Essay, and/or the scholarly source itself. It is normally better to present in lecture style, rather than reading extensively. *The presentation should be 10-12 minutes long;* you will be warned as your time limit approaches, and required to conclude after 12 minutes have passed.

**Research Essay Prospectus (5% of final grade).** In around 2 pages, discuss the one or two main alternatives your Research Essay may take. Mention the basis for your topic(s) in our assigned readings, and how additional primary and secondary sources have confirmed, undermined, or led you to adapt your original theses. This assignment is graded not on the basis of the strength of its current thesis, but on the evidence of effort in formulating and researching substantive questions.

**Research Essay (50% of final grade).** One 22-25 page essay. It should form a coherent whole with a thesis. It should follow standard models for professional grammar, style, and documentation (consult the professor's "A Brief Guide to College Writing," on Blackboard). It should reveal substantial outside research, as well as a strong command of the assigned sources which are relevant to the topic.

**Research Essay Presentation (5% of final grade).** In 7-10 minutes, discuss your topic, why it may be considered significant, what you ended up arguing, and some of your core evidence and reasoning. Like the Review Presentation, no student may exceed the official time limit.

## Course and University Policies

**Honor Code.** The Hillsdale College Honor Code will be enforced: “A Hillsdale College student is honorable in conduct, honest in word and deed, dutiful in study and service and respectful of the rights of others. Through education the student rises to self-government.” Please consult the professor with any questions about appropriate use of sources, or collaboration with other students.

**Excused Absence Policy.** Credibly documented illness may be counted as excused, at the discretion of the professor. As for absences due to college-sponsored events (e.g., athletic competitions, debate, forensics), a student’s primary collegiate responsibility is academic; therefore, these should be rare. When they are unavoidable, students are responsible for notifying the professor in advance. Regardless of absences, students are responsible for meeting the standard of knowledge established by the professor for the class.

**Disabilities.** Students with documented disabilities are required to notify the professor as soon as possible if accommodation is needed. The professor will provide all reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, but students are not exempted from fulfilling the normal requirements of the course. Work completed before the student notifies the professor of the disability may be counted toward the final grade at the discretion of the instructor.

## Course Schedule

**W Jan. 25, session #1.** Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* (1721), Letters 102–103 (pp. 140-44);  
Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), XV.3, XX.1 (pp. 248-49, 338);  
Voltaire, *Letters concerning the English Nation* (1733–1734), Letters VI, from XII, from XIII, from XX, XXIII, and from XXV (pp. 29-30, 49, 59-60, 98-99, 112-15, 131);  
Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), s.v. “Luxury” and “Virtue” (pp. 367-69, 495-96);  
Rousseau, from Letter to Monsieur Parisot (1742), pp. 14-15, 17-18.

**W Jan. 25, #2.** *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* (1750–1751), Part I (in Gourevitch, pp. 1-15);  
Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, [16, 24-25, 31] (pp. 26, 33-34, 40);  
Plutarch, *Pyrrhus*, [20] (pp. 235-36);  
Plutarch, *Cato the Elder*, [22-23] (pp. 30-31).

**W Feb. 1, #1.** *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, Part II (pp. 16-28);  
Montaigne, “On Schoolmasters’ Learning” (in *Essays* [1580], pp. 153-54, 160-62);  
Rousseau, from letter to Malesherbes, 12 January 1762 (pp. 575-76).

**W Feb. 1, #2.** *Observations* (1751), [13-19, 29-65] (in Gourevitch, pp. 35-36, 39-51);  
Preface to *Narcissus* (1753), [19-41] (in Gourevitch, pp. 97-106);  
Voltaire, letter to Rousseau, 30 August 1755, and reply (pp. 102-7);  
Recommended: Alexis de Tocqueville, letter to Charles Stoeffels, 21 April 1830 (pp. 1369-72).

**W Feb. 8, #1.** *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (written ca. 1754–1755, 1761), chapters 2, 8-11, from 19 [1-4], and 20 (in Gourevitch, pp. 252-53, 266-81, 295-96, 298-99).

**W Feb. 8, #2.** *J. J. Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva, to M. D’Alembert, on his article “Geneva,” and especially on the project of establishing a Dramatic Theater in that City* (1758), pp. 253-56, 261-70, 293-300, 319-20;  
*Letter of M. d’Alembert to M. J. J. Rousseau* (1759), pp. 369-71.

- W Feb. 15, #1.** *Rousseau to M. D'Alembert*, pp. 322-28, 330-38, 343-52;  
*Letters Written from the Mountain* (1764), from Book IX, pp. 292-93;  
 Recommended: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840), II 3.12 (pp. 696-700).
- W Feb. 15, #2.** *Emile, or On Education* (1762), Book I, pp. 31-56[2];  
 Augustine, *Confessions*, I.vi.8, vii.11 (pp. 7, 8-9);  
 John Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (1693), §§104-5 (p. 164);  
*Letter to Christophe de Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris* (1763), pp. 28-29.
- W Feb. 22, #1.** *Emile*, Book I, pp. 59[3]-60, 62[5]-64[1], 65[4]-70[1], 74[2-3];  
*Emile*, Book II, 77-89 [1];  
 Seneca, *The Happy Life*, [3.3-4] (pp. 242-43);  
 Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* (1642), Preface, [10-13] (pp. 10-11).
- W Feb. 22, #2.** *Emile*, Book II, pp. 89[2]-105[1], 110[3]-13[1], 116[5]-18[4], 121[3]-24[5];  
 Locke, *Education*, §§31-36, 54-57, 61, 81 (pp. 102-5, 115-16, 119, 142f).
- W Mar. 1, #1.** *Emile*, Book II, pp. 124[6]-31[2], 134-37, 141[2]-43[1], 150[3]-56[2], 160[2]-63;  
 Montaigne, from "On Educating Children" (in *Essays*, pp. 184-86);  
 Locke, *Education*, §116 (pp. 180-81);  
 Recommended: Julia Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Man, and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (2002), pp. 136-37.
- W Mar. 1, #2.** *Emile*, Book III, pp. 165-68[3], 177[3]-78[4], 183[7]-86[4], 189[4]-205[3], 207[4]-8;  
 Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719, pp. 108-10).
- W Mar. 8, #1.** *Emile*, Book IV, pp. 211-35[1];  
 Recommended: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II 3.1 (pp. 649-54).
- W Mar. 8, #2.** *Emile*, Book IV, pp. 235[2]-45[3], 252[4]-66[3];  
 Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, XVI.12 (pp. 272-73);  
 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), AK 6:479f (p. 593).
- March 13–17: Spring break.*
- W Mar. 22, #1.** *Emile*, Book IV, pp. 266[4]-89[2]. (Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar.)
- W Mar. 22, #2.** *Emile*, Book IV, pp. 289[3]-315[1]. (Profession of Faith, continued, etc.)  
 Recommended: Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), AK 5:86f (pp. 209-10).
- W Mar. 29, #1.** *Emile*, Book IV, pp. 315[2]-21[2], 323[3]-25[3], 339[2-5], 341[4]-42[3].
- W Mar. 29, #2.** *Emile*, Book IV, pp. 344[3]-55;  
 Book V, pp. 357-65[1];  
 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), from chs. 1, 2, and 3 (pp. 15-16, 24-26, 51-52).
- Research Essay Prospectus due *Saturday*, April 1, by 11:00 p.m.
- W Apr. 5, #1.** *Emile*, Book V, pp. 368[4]-72[1], 373[4]-74[2], 377[2]-78[3], 380[3]-83[2], 386[5]-402[1];  
 Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.ix.19 (pp. 168-69).

**W Apr. 5, #2.** *Emile*, Book V, pp. 406[2]-10[2], 413[2]-19[1], 425[4]-33[4], 435[4]-39[1].

**W Apr. 12, #1.** *Emile*, Book V, pp. 439[2]-450[4], 455[2]-62[4].

**W Apr. 12, #2.** *Emile*, Book V, pp. 462[5]-80;

Epictetus, *Discourses*, IV.1 [98-113] (pp. 186-88);

Recommended: Fénelon, *Telemachus, The Son of Ulysses* (1699), from Book X (pp. 161-65).

**W Apr. 19, #1.** Leo Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius* (2005), pp. 354-61, 390-95, 397-401;

Preface to the Neuchâtel manuscript of *Confessions* (written ca. 1764), pp. 643-49;

*Confessions* (written ca. 1764–1770), Book I, p. 5.

Recommended: Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue* (1986), pp. 156-59.

**W Apr. 19, #2.** *Reveries* (written 1776–1778), Walks I–II, V, and from VII (pp. 3-19, 49-58, 73[3]-75[1]);

Recommended: Edmund Burke, “A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly” (1791), pp. 47-49, 53-54.

**W Apr. 26, #1.** *Reveries*, Walks III–IV (pp. 20-48).

**W Apr. 26, #2.** *Reveries*, Walks VI, from VII, from VIII, and IX-X (pp. 59-71[1], 83-85[3], 94-108);

Recommended: Mendham, “A Brief Guide to College Writing.”

- Research Essays due *Tuesday*, May 2, at 11:00 p.m., sent by email attachment.

**Thursday, May 4, 10:30 a.m.** Research Essay Presentations.