Note: I will not be reading this so much as commenting on it from the perspective of the thinkers of temporal order, MM

**Persian Letters in Time:**

**Adhesive Past: Bright, Unstable Present: Divergent, Fragile Futures**

Michael Mosher

1. *Persian Letters* as Pivot

It has been a long time since my introduction to Judith Shklar’s then famous Enlightenment seminar but I still remember being set back on my heels by the first assignment, Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*. Alan Gilbert was similarly swept away. He dropped out of the seminar to do an independent reading of the text with Shklar. Much later we published our parallel and differing accounts in *Political Theory*.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Miho de Montesquieu, a contemporary descendent of the family, once asked me which of the renown ancestor’s books did I find most attractive? Without reflection I replied the *Persian Letters,* although by then my published argumentswere anchored in the *Spirit of the Laws*. I was simply being nostalgic about that first impact. This chapter is a creature of that same nostalgia, an experiment in which I rehearse my responses to readings of this book over many years. The focus on “my times” will track as well “Montesquieu’s times”—the temporal orders at play in his works. Which past and which future established the problematic of the *Persian Letters* that led the author into the exceptionally different books of *Considerations on the Romans* and *Spirit of the Laws*?

As a young graduate student I felt the tides had shifted in moving to Harvard from Berkeley, the latter being the era of the Free Speech Movement and of the Hannah Arendt/ Sheldon Wolin inflected Berkeley School of Political Theory. Usbek and Rica were somehow a pivot away from all that. Later in an encyclopedia article that channeled Leo Strauss’ “What is Political Philosophy?” I tried to explain the pivot:

“Wolin carved out a heroic role for the political philosopher … who was preoccupied with threats to political autonomy and the loss of citizen capacity [that were] glimpsed in Machiavelli and republican thinkers and all but smothered, he thought, by social and organizational forces … Being absorbed in the “social” augured the loss of political consciousness. It is possible to resist this argument. Montesquieu, the classic theorist of the role of society in politics, showed how the social “principles” of honor and virtue sustained rather than undermined political autonomy.” [[2]](#endnote-2)

Granted, assertions of autonomy in the *Persian Letters* were *mostly* either illusions or despotic desires. Even the casual reader notes that everywhere in the *Persian Letters* people are blind, except naturally in the institutions for the blind where Rica finds the inmates playing cards, Letter 32. The incapacity to see is nearly the dominant theme. Usbek explains that “we are so blind that we do not know when we should grieve

and when we should rejoice. We possess almost nothing but false sadness and false joy,” Letter 40.[[3]](#endnote-3) Although Usbek thinks it is the task of an intellectual detached from illusions to point this out, it is the nature of his own blindness that is ultimately at stake.

None of this was especially evident when I first read the *Letters*. Permit me to recall two pieces of writing which were then my touchstones: Paul Valery’s haunting 1926 “Preface” to *Lettres persanes*, commended to me by Joe Paff, Wolin’s teaching assistant and my mentor; and a chapter I later discovered from Marshall Berman’s *Politics of Authenticity*, 1970, which spied the origins of nineteenth century political romanticism in the 1721 novel. One essay revealed the sad pessimism of the European who in the aftermath of world war saw in the *Letters* a mirror to 1920s malaise, prescient it seems in its intimations of unwanted futures. The other essay obviously exhibited the buoyant optimism and utopian political hopes of the American 1960s, hopes that were themselves deflated in the coming decades.

For Valery, the very taste exhibited in the novel was “a sign of the end of the show.”[[4]](#endnote-4) It was on the surface an exhibit of epicurean pleasures situated between “order and disorder.” It was also a prophecy:

The institutions still stand. They are great and imposing. But without showing any visible alteration, their splendid presence is now nearly all they are … their future is secretly at an end … Criticism and contempt weaken and empty them of all subsequent value. The body politic quietly loses its futurity. [[5]](#endnote-5)

This was precisely the view of the doctoral thesis and first book of German conservative Reinhart Koselleck, who did so much to advance our awareness of temporal ghosts. He had wanted to call his work “Dialectic of Enlightenment,” but that title had already been taken by Adorno and Horkheimer. In their strangely parallel works, we can see how twentieth century thinkers from right and left saw dialectical reversals in the libertarian promises of the era of *lumière*. Valery’s *Persian Letters* tracked Koselleck’s warning that criticism of a certain sort engendered its own crises. [[6]](#endnote-6)

Berman’s argument was the flip side of this, optimistic, hopeful, and celebratory because (unlike Koselleck) he thought enlightenment and criticism created a better future. For him the *Persian Letters* “begins in exoticism and ends with revolution.” The latter refers to Roxanne’s “harem” revolution/ rebellion against her husband Usbek who was also a symbolic stand in for the political tyrant.

For Berman the *Letters* pointed to a heroic 1789. The book, Berman writes, is “one of those rare works which contain within themselves the whole history of an epoch …[it] prefigures the course of European history in the eighteenth century.” The later work of Montesquieu was dowdy and conservative. By contrast, in the *Persian Letters*, “we are here faced with a virtue that is profoundly revolutionary, whose deepest impulse is to overthrow a repressive status quo.”[[7]](#endnote-7) He did not linger on the figure of Roxanne but arguably she was cut out of Berkeley School and the Arendt-Wolin story about autonomous actors. She enacts a democratic revolution. Its failure, which Berman ignored, could be taken as a repudiation of expectations for autonomous action, reinforcement perhaps for Wolin’s later pessimism. Democracy was only a “fugitive” phenomenon.

Despite the evident contrast in mood, the Valery-Berman claims were conceptually congruent. In 1721, in 1926, and in 1970, an epoch was ending and the character of the future was now at stake. In addition, the sardonic wit of Valery seemed as drawn to the delights of disorder and anarchism as were the cheerful bromides of Berman.

1. Distracted by *Esprit/ Geist*

Of course, so was I so drawn. A year in Paris may have cured me of Berkeley anarchism. Ironically, in post 1968 France, 1970-71, I discovered political authority and the state. That is to say, I started reading Hegel and the French Hegelians. I now understood how Montesquieu could write in 1753 to the exiled *parlement* judge, le president Durey de Meinières, that Meinières did not understand the appropriate role of the state:

The safety of the state is the supreme law …To say that you do not anticipate the ruin of the state and that you will perish before it, is not a reason, for your ruin counts for very little compared with that of the state. Think carefully about the state, examine things as they are; in comparison with the state, you are nothing. [[8]](#endnote-8)

These sentiments appear in firm contrast to the opening of the *Persian Letters*. The old King (Louis XIV) is dead and the threat of despotic rule has been at least temporarily removed. Nevertheless, these admonitions to Meinières were consistent with Montesquieu’s mature philosophy in which the idea of legitimate constitutional monarchy—and of the modern regime—was tied to the Bodinian insistence that “the prince is the source of all political and civil power,” (*Laws* 2.4).[[9]](#endnote-9) The famous intermediary bodies have their work cut out for them as official channels of resistance to monarchical power, but they shouldn’t be imagined as a guerrilla force striking against an illegitimate executive. Together they were, as Montesquieu himself wrote, “the nature of monarchial government” which included its Bodinian foundation.

When I returned to the States, I suggested to Dita Shklar that the Montesquieu-Hegel trajectory might be a good thesis topic. She did not object. Later she wrote her own separate books about Hegel and Montesquieu, which was probably a more sensible division of labor.[[10]](#endnote-10)

My work was not especially focused on the *Persian Letters*, however. Compared to the later work of Montesquieu and to any work by Hegel, there is nothing in the *Persian Letters* like this feeling for a social/political *esprit* (spirit/ mentality) circulating through webs of law; or for the shape shifting guises of *Geist* (spirit/ mentality again) that might culminate in a rational state. The *Letters* is less a text in political philosophy or philosophy of history and more a series of reflections on moral psychology—a story of characters negotiating or failing to negotiate various terrains. Together they constituted a moral geography in which various kinds of disastrous relations were revealed among those who live either too far apart or too close together.

A tradition that stems from Montesquieu divides authority between state and society. Its successors include both allies and rivals, Rousseau, Hegel, Constant, Marx. The allies of Montesquieu have always been ambivalent about the character of authority. It is still a lively topic whatever one’s partisan preferences. The theme of a choice between two camps runs through my fellow Shklar seminar participant Paul Thomas’ first book, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*.[[11]](#endnote-11) In a later generation, Jacob Levy’s *Rationalism, Pluralism, and Freedom* found nourishment for an anti-statist social plurality in Montesquieu against the “rationalist” claims of Hegel whose spiritual descendants include apparently John Rawls.[[12]](#endnote-12) I elided the differences between the two understandings of authority in “The Particulars of a Universal Politics: Hegel’s Adaptation of Montesquieu’s Typology.”[[13]](#endnote-13) It channeled Michael Oakeshott’s claim for Montesquieu and Hegel being allied thinkers for whom state authority meant citizens “joined in acknowledgement of the authority of a practice and not in respect of a common substantive purpose.”[[14]](#endnote-14) I was attracted by this description of liberal authority. Its defect was that it homogenized historical figures who were distinctive and concealed the pathologies of this idea of authority.

1. Return to the Persian Letters

Fast forward to a summary of subsequent engagements with the book. To speak anachronistically (and for some interpreters, erroneously), Montesquieu’s “feminism” drew my attention. I began by noting that Usbek famously justified suicide with a Lockean argument designed to support rebellion not suicide:

Society is founded on mutual advantage. But when it becomes onerous to me, who should prevent me from renouncing it? (Letter 76, p. 125).

The argument parallels Usbek’s commendation of the English who believe that only mutual gratitude obliges and only a prince who pursues the happiness of the people should be obeyed. In the face of oppression, “nothing binds them; nothing ties them to the prince; and they return to their natural liberty,” (Letter 104, p. 168).

Roxanne adopted these Lockean liberal thoughts to her own purposes, the justification of revolution.

“I might have lived in servitude, but I have always been free. I have reformed your laws by those of nature, and my spirit has always remained independent” (Letter 161, p. 268).

This was the line that led me to Montesquieu’s views on gender. *Political Theory* published the results, “The Judgmental Gaze of European Women: Gender, Sexuality and the Critique of Republican Rule” in 1994.[[15]](#endnote-15) It was also a reply to a particular European woman, the person to whom I had falsely claimed that the *Letters* were the center of my attention. But in publishing this essay, the novel had once again grabbed my attention. In addition, the subtitle was a cookie crumb trail that led to the argument about forms of government in *Spirit of the Laws*. A year later Diana Schaub published her own admirable interpretation of these issues in *Montesquieu’s Erotic Liberalism*.[[16]](#endnote-16)

In the aftermath of these studies, three more topics struck me as noteworthy. First, the novel lays down an outline to Montesquieu’s views about empire, both pro and con, which were more fully developed in the *Considerations* and *Laws*.[[17]](#endnote-17) Second, I had previously ignored the Troglodyte letters but did they hold the secret to Montesquieu’s indecision about forms of government, as Michael Sonenscher argued? Third, I took up the issue of political economy. I wondered why Montesquieu so comprehensively and unambiguously condemned John Law’s takeover of the Regency finances. Truth to tell, I disagreed with Montesquieu and felt closer to Voltaire’s views on the topic. This last concern was the beginning of many conversations with Constantine Vassiliou in Rotterdam, Toronto, Vancouver, and now Houston.[[18]](#endnote-18)

There was one other engagement with the text. A throwback to my old doctoral dissertation, it is found in a compact sentence that I wrote for a book just out in May, 2021.

Roxanne and Usbek were the doubled soul of the Enlightenment reader, simultaneously seeking to do good in revolt against tyrannical habits (Roxanne) and yet by the light of the same literature in doubt about whether there was anything good to do (Usbek).[[19]](#endnote-19)

I will unpack this sentence in due course, but for now let us turn to Montesquieu’s time, the felt quality of past, present and future in the *Persian Letters*.

1. Persian Letters I—The Adhesive Past of Valery

Montesquieu painted on a vast canvas in all his books. The *Letters* articulated the nature of a political space measured by the distance of Persia from France. Time was a complicating factor in governing across such a distance. The commands of the prince (Usbek) in Paris directed to his realm in Ispahan took too much time to reach their destination in a “timely,” that is to say, effective manner. The eunuchs (read: the neutered as colonial bureaucrats) were expected to carry out these distant orders, but given the difficulties of overcoming time and space, eunuchs became the real rulers. It was Montesquieu’s first critique of empire as despotic form of government. The size or reach of empire defeated communication.

This bookreturns the reader to an orientalist trope, the despotism of the East. At first the reader is misled. Usbek is the representative of the seeker escaping irrationality and superstation. He was indistinguishable from the enlightened European. In the shiny bright present of Paris, the old despotic king (Louis XIV) was gone and the succeeding era was busy parrying with wit and skepticism the tyrannical ideas of the past. Usbek was avatar of the universal appeal of these new ideas—as not only their champion but in his own right an educator dialogically sensitive to the perspectives of diverse interlocutors.[[20]](#endnote-20) However, when this hero should turn into villain, the adhesive past seemed to get stuck again in the present—despotic Ispahan and liberated Paris glued together, the orientalist barrier between East and West turned illusion.

Usbek’s enlightenment was a thing of the mind, not the heart. There was no balm for his obsessive emotions. Montesquieu introduced near the beginning of this vast movement of “enlightened” ideas what Adorno and Horkheimer wanted to say “dialectically” two centuries later. The empire of science— knowledge, enlightenment, truth—was capable of tyranny. For Montesquieu, however, this was a warning only about possibilities. For these later critics, it became foreordained necessity.

1. Persian Letters II—The Militant Future of Berman

In 1725 Montesquieu delivered an address to the Academy of Bordeaux “On the motives that ought to encourage us in the sciences.”[[21]](#endnote-21) It was in effect a supplement to Roxanne’s rebellion against despotism and a militant version of the *Persian Letters*, with all the light hearted entertainment removed.

In this talk, Montesquieu asked how the sixteenth century “Mexicans” and “Peruvians” —the “Americans”—could have resisted the Spanish conquistadors, those exemplars of the bad old past that he had expected modernity to overcome. Here Montesquieu made the really extraordinary move. Survival and victory over the foreign invaders depended on modern philosophy and worldly social science. It did not rely on the capacity of science to invent new weapons but on its promise to reorient minds, a move which echoed Platonic antiquity: the turning of imprisoned souls toward the light of philosophy in the cave/ city of false beliefs.

Montesquieu proposed a counter-factual history. Imagine that a century before the Spanish arrived on the shores of the Americas, the philosopher René Descartes had emigrated to become the teacher of the Indians. Descartes would have taught the Indians skepticism—how to throw doubt on what we believe in order to reconstruct belief on a worldly basis. For the young Montesquieu, this translated into materialism and skepticism about the gods. So instructed, no (native) American would have believed that the Spaniards with their strange horses and beards were irresistible gods. They were only mortal “machines.” They could be worn out. The Indian nations could have starved the invaders or killed them on the beaches from a thousand hiding places. The proclaimed herald of “moderation” –-which really is the theme of the *Spirit of the Laws*—here appears in tougher guise as the theorist of asymmetrical guerilla warfare.

There would be cultural loss on the side of the Mexicans and Peruvians. For Cartesian science to turn the minds of the Amerindians toward the light, it had to undermine traditions, religion, and culture: everything that had made them susceptible to illusions about their situation. It was unavoidable. Montesquieu’s science pointed to “curing people of destructive prejudices,” a line that is taken from the Discourse of 1725 and inserted into the Preface to the *Spirit of the Laws*. It paralleled another remark from the Preface: “it is not a matter of indifference that the people be enlightened.”

The story of a European philosopher whose teachings led to the fantasy of a Mexican defeat of the still half barbarian European conquerors was in effect a projection onto colonial frontiers of an internal European “struggle of enlightenment with superstition,” Hegel’s summary explanation for the causes of the French Revolution.[[22]](#endnote-22)

1. The Bright Unstable Present

The temporal present of the *Persian Letters* was bright with possibilities, but shadowed with doubts about the disastrous past. This past initially appeared to be receding rapidly, as the Parisian public, buoyed by new currents of thought, was ready to sail into the shining future. The speed of the retreat from the past could be rendered as spatial metaphor. It matched the distance from France to Persia, which in a yearlong travel, Rica and Usbek began their education into a new, apparently more rational world. By collapsing that distance (Usbek’s meltdown, his wife’s rebellion) Montesquieu gave away the game. Oriental despotism was not the main topic. The main topic was the continued nearness of despotism even on the shores of the European enlightenment, a theme nicely articulated by Vickie Sullivan’s *Montesquieu and the Despotic Ideas of Europe*. Moreover, the reversal of enlightenment hero into despot put all schemes for change and improvement into doubt.[[23]](#endnote-23)

Unlike other scenarios of modernization, Montesquieu’s was not a story about a self-confident developmental state trying to usher in the future. Christopher Clark’s *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics* illustrated what was involved by contrasting the developmental state thesis against its antithesis. In the Brandenburg-Prussia of Friedrich Wilhelm (1620-88), the political elite felt “the present as a precarious threshold between a catastrophic past and an uncertain future,” which it was the task of state officials to manage in resistance to local authorities. A present threatened by past and future captures as well the temporality of the *Persian Letters*, but significantly in Montesquieu’s text there is no reliance on state authority as pilot or guide to the future. The argument of the *Laws* is for negotiation/ compromise between the crown and “intermediary bodies.” The model is closer to the temporality of Fredrick II who replaced the developmental model of a “forwards-leaning historicity”[[24]](#endnote-24) inaugurated by his great grandfather and opted instead for a “neo-classical steady state temporality in which motifs of timelessness and cyclical repetition predominated and the state was no longer an engine of historical change.”[[25]](#endnote-25) Caution and pessimism had replaced optimism and self-confidence in the integrity of elites.

1. Financing *Doux Commerce*

It is a central feature of the *Laws* but not a really a theme in the *Letters*: *doux commerce*, or “soft,” peaceful international trade and communication. *Doux commerce* projected a vision not unlike the much lamented post 1989 globalizing world economy. Commercial world war—the so-called Seven Years War, 1756-1763--was to threatened the prospects for Montesquieu’s vision only eight years after the publication of the *Spirit of the Laws*. Similarly, national rivalries seem to have threatened the latest version of globalized *doux commerce*. In the *Persian Letters*, however, globalizing economy was far from a remedy to political instability for the *Letters* focused on how *doux commerce* was financed.

The denouement of Usbek’s seraglio coincided with Montesquieu’s report on the instability and tyranny of the Regency financial “system,” the ingenious scheme of Scottish economist and gambler, John Law. Along with similar volatile schemes in England and Holland, Laws’ “system” led to Europe’s first stock market crash in 1720. Usbek was stand in for John Law who for Montesquieu was the personification of enlightenment thinker as despotic actor. In the *Letters*, John Law was a confidence man who sold bags of wind—paper money---in exchange for gold and exhorted bewildered audiences to enter into “the empire of imagination,” which meant not an imaginative life, but an imaginary existence (Letter 146, p. 241).

Nevertheless, Voltaire thought that John Law had saved France. Despite the bankruptcy, commerce had revived. Reducing debt and stimulating the economy were the two principal defenses of Law’s reforms. In addition, the French could have benefitted from a bank that consolidated the finances of the monarchy, but its failure to do so led to the unsustainable public debt that was one of the causes for the calling of the Estates General, which transformed itself into a National Assembly that stumbled into a French Revolution.[[26]](#endnote-26)

1. Divergent Futures: Fragile Moderation or Revolution Without Traction

The world of the *Persian Letters* opened up onto two futures which were mutually exclusive. One opening was the hedged and qualified global compromises of *Spirit of the Laws*. This relative retreat from forward thinking state led development was motivated most likely by the memory of the stock market crash of 1720 which represented to Montesquieu the dangers inherent in the management of international finance. Sometimes enlightened intellects made things better, but sometimes they made things worse. The future that Montesquieu projected in the *Laws* was utopian enough—*doux commerce* and all that—but it was a project of cautious moderation. The alternative, the heroic developmental state, required better moral characters than could be reasonably expected.

The other future of the *Persian Letters* Montesquieu rejected. It was what Berman saw potentially in the text, celebration of democratic revolution in the figure of Roxanne. Arguably this is what Montesquieu also saw in his old fantasy story of Descartes among the Indians. There remains a question. Why shouldn’t we take the harem rebellion as Berman did: an intimation of the necessary democratic revolutions to come? There is something troubling about the couple Usbek and Roxanne. They were a couple united by coercion on one side and deceit on the other. I do not forget that Usbek really did have enlightened ideals—of the mind, not the heart. He was an educator of others, including Roxanne, even if in the end he was a hypocrite, a conformist to patriarchal heritage, and a man enslaved to his passions. Worst, his skepticism led him into nihilist disregard of others. I have so far only quoted the reasonable Lockean half of Letter 76. This defense of suicide which, as already recounted, doubles as a defense of rebellion, falls into a darker place when Usbek exults: “I can disturb all of nature as I please.” He adds:

one man more or less in the world—what am I saying— that all men together, a hundred million heads like ours, are only a tenuous and minute atom (Letter 76, p. 126).

The remedy for this chilling nihilism may simply be the heroine Roxanne. Maybe, but think about Usbek and Roxanne as a single, strangely complementary figure. In *Neveu de Rameau* (Rameau’s Nephew), Diderot took up the model of the skeptical idealist torn between moderation and revolution.[[27]](#endnote-27) It was a dialogue between Moi (me) and *Lui* (him). *Lui* was a Parisian bohemian who lived by his wits and believed in no one and in nothing. The narrator *Moi* attempted to defend principle and moderation but was overwhelmed by the skeptical arguments of *Lui* who nevertheless was all along only a projection of the unwanted thoughts of *Moi*. Hegel adopted this dialogue as an explanation for how the moderate Enlightenment became revolutionary. *Lui* and *Moi* were the doubled sides of a single personality. *Moi* was the moderate Enlightenment, whose procedures for self-inspection led worryingly to the voice of *Lui*. Diderot’s prescient dialogue about the origins of revolutionary action remained unpublished in the eighteenth century but consider the pair Usbek/ Roxanne as a predecessor description. Usbek was an intelligent representative of the skeptical Enlightenment who in the end believed in nothing. He was not a bohemian but a figure of authority—the skeptic as despot (Napoleon?)—and despite his “enlightenment,” given to bouts of irrational rage. His wife Roxanne was the “*Moi*” of this narrative: a moderate except when pushed to the wall, and then she rationally and methodically prepared a well-justified Lockean-like revolt, but for a rebellion/ democracy that failed. It might not have failed had she borrowed not only Usbek’s ideals but his nihilism about human lives in her pursuit of revolutionary means, but then as many subsequent histories of revolution have demonstrated, it would have failed in another way.

Roxanne and Usbek were the doubled soul of the Enlightenment reader, simultaneously seeking to do good in revolt against tyrannical habits (Roxanne) and yet by the light of the same literature in doubt whether there was anything good to do (Usbek).[[28]](#endnote-28)

1. Conclusion

Despite the intellectual and comic pleasures of this Regency novel, it had no especially desirable future. (1) In the light of the moves made in *Spirit of the Laws*, the *Letters* pointed to a vision of moderation, *doux commerce*, that was probably the best that could be expected but which had to remain blind to the forces disrupting it, predatory war, colonial adventure etc. (2) Or it pointed to the skeptic’s revolution where the ideals that might have inaugurated rebellion would have no traction, no way of morally anchoring the revolutionary means employed to establish a new world. Whether desirable or not, these two paths out of the novel managed to circulate through a lot of history in the following centuries.

Although my earliest readings of the *Persian Letters* are now remote memories, it appears that I never fundamentally departed from the trajectory established in my thinking through the incompatible but also strangely congruent perspectives of Paul Valery and Marshall Berman. Trajectories (1721—, 1926—, 1970—) also show how they have betrayed their original impulses.

1. **Notes**

   Alan Gilbert, “’Internal Restlessness’: Individuality and Community in Montesquieu*,” Political Theory*, Vol. 22 No. 1, Feb. 1994, 45-70; Michael Mosher, “The Judgmental Gaze of European Women: Gender, Sexuality, and the Critique of Republican Rule,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 22 No. 2, Feb 1994, 25-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Michael Mosher, “Political Philosophy,” *Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, eds. Michael T. Gibbons, Diana Coole, Elisabeth Ellis, Kennan Ferguson, Wiley, October 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, ed. Stuart D. Warner, trans. Stuart D. Warner and Stéphane Douard (South Bend Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Paul Valery, “The Persian Letters,” in *History and Politics*, trans by Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews, Bollingen Series XIV 10 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), p. 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Valery, p. 219. For the French Preface, see Paul Valery, *Varieté* I and II (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1988, originally published 1959;

   Max Horkheimer &Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans by Edmund Jephcott, ed. Gunselin Schmid Noerr (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 5, 44. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Michael Mosher, “Monarchy’s Paradox: Honor in the Face of Sovereign Power” in David Carrithers, Michael Mosher & Paul Rahe, eds.*, Montesquieu’s Science of Politics: Essays on The Spirit of Laws* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 196. See also Jean Erhard, *Esprit des Mots*, p. 153. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, [1748] trans Anne Cohler, Basia Miller, and Harold Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Judith N. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Judith N. Shklar, *Montesquieu* (Oxford University Press, 1987); and my own Charles Taylor inflected thesis: “The Spirit That Governs Cities: Modes of Human Association in the Writings of Montesquieu and Hegel,” PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, December 1975. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jacob T. Levy, *Rationalism, Pluralism, & Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); For the suggestion that Rawls was allied with Hegel, see p. 290 note 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Michael Mosher, “The Particulars of a Universal Politics: Hegel’s Adaptation of Montesquieu’s Typology,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78 No. 1, March 1984, 179-188. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 242. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Mosher, “The Judgmental Gaze of European Women: Gender, Sexuality, and the Critique of Republican Rule,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 22 No. 2, Feb 1994, 25-44 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Diana Schaub, *Montesquieu’s Erotic Liberalism: Women and Revolution in Montesquieu’s Persian Letters* (Lanham MD: Roman & Littlefield, 1995). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See my “Montesquieu on Empire and Enlightenment,” Chapter 5 of *Empire and Modern Political Thought,* ed. Sankar Muthu, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 145-205; or “Montesquieu on Conquest: Three Cartesian Heroes and Five Good Enough Empires,” *Revue Montesquieu*, No° 8, 2005-2006, Societé Montesquieu, Libraire Droz, 81-110. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. On topics two and three, see Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton NY: Princeton University Press, 2007), especially chapter 2 “Montesquieu and the Idea of Monarchy.” [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Mosher, “Democratic Crises, Revolutions and Civil Resistance: Revolutionary Imaginaries in an Era of Enlightenment, 1640-1799,” in Michael Mosher and Anna Plassart eds., *A Cultural History of Democracy in the Age of Enlightenment, Volume* 4 (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2021), pp. 175-200. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. See Ryan Patrick Hanley, “Distance Learning: Political Education in the Persian Letters,” *Review of Politics* 83 No. 4 Fall 2021, 533-54. I agree with the overall thesis albeit by way of a slightly difference angle of vision and as filtered through a different literature. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. “Discours sur les motifs,” *Oeuvres Complètes de Montesquieu*, Volume 8, 495-502; See also Montesquieu, *My Thoughts*, trans and ed. by Henry C. Clark (Indianapolis ID: Liberty Fund, 2012). No 1265, pp. 338-40. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. G. W. F. Hegel, Phänomenologie des Geistes, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1952), pp. 385-406; *Phenomenology of Spirit* trans A. A. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 329-48. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Vickie B. Sullivan, *Montesquieu & the Despotic Ideas of Europe* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017). See my review, *Perspectives on Politics*, 16 No. 3, September 2018, 826-28. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Evident theoretically in Hegel and actually in Japan. See Mosher, “Nihonteki Riso to Hegeru Seijiron” [Japanese Ideals and Hegel’s Political Argument] in Gendai Nihon no Paburiku Firosofi [Public Philosophy in Modern Japan], Naoshi Yamawaki ed., (Tokyo: Shinseisha, 1998), pp. 80-99. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Christopher Clark, *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich* (Princeton NY: Princeton University Politics, 2019). p. 2. For two essays which explore the second of these 18th century temporalities, see my “What Montesquieu Taught—‘Perfection does not Concern Men or Things Universally,’” in *Montesquieu and His Legacy*, ed. Rebecca E. Kingston, SUNY Press, 2009, 7-28; and “Free Trade, Free Speech, and Free Love: Monarchy from the Liberal Prospect in mid-eighteenth century France,” Chapter 5, *Monarchisms in the Age of Enlightenment: Liberty, Patriotism, and the Common Good*, eds. Hans Blom, John Christian Laursen, and Luisa Simonutti (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 101-18. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew*, trans. Jacques Barzun and Ralph H. Bowen (Indianapolis IN: Hackett, 1956, 2001) [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Mosher, “Democratic Crises,” *A Cultural History of Democracy*, p. 194. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)