



Enlightenment Salon



The Baron Paul d'Holbach and the talented Julie de Lespinasse epitomized the Enlightenment through their parties, or "salons," in which the brightest minds of Europe gathered informally to discuss philosophy, science, and politics. In reality, it was often little more than a festival of the "beautiful people." Oftentimes, wit took precedence over intelligence, style over substance, and the influence of the fashion police was always a commanding one. The Parisian salon overflowed with self-indulgence, showing off, and intellectual narcissism, *BUT*....it also attracted some of the best minds that Europe could offer.

In class, we are going to hold a salon: each student will portray a particular historical figure from the Enlightenment or Scientific Revolution. The host(ess) will see to it that everyone gets to expound on one key thought, theory, or idea. Each student will come to the salon with a specific well-prepared monologue. It will be the job of the host(ess) to keep the conversation going and make smooth transitions from one expounder to the next. At the end of each part, participants are expected to disagree, ask for clarification, or simply toss in their own two centimes.

In preparation for this event, each student will complete the following:

- 1) Choose a thinker from the attached list.
- 2) Write a one-page monologue based on ONE major idea or philosophy your person held. These monologues are due at least two days **prior** to the salon. You are, of course, making up a portion of the monologue, since it is your job to transform what this person said in writing to an understandable and forcefully delivered harangue. Present the ideas as if this is the *first time* people have had the privilege of hearing these mighty words of wisdom. You may mention others in the room, either acknowledging your deepest debt to their work ("I have stood on the shoulders of giants") or discounting their earlier drivel.

Remember, you want to make yourself look *good* – which very well might happen at the *expense* of others (again, think venomous thoughts)

3) Day of the Salon: When the host(ess) calls on you, you must be ready to expound. You may speak from notes you have prepared based on your monologue. However, you may not read directly from your script. The most effective monologues are often done extemporaneously, based on an in-depth understanding of the main philosophical point one is trying to make.

4) After you have expounded, the rest of the group will, in various ways, comment on your points or hurl invective at you. Your response to their remarks is also part of your grade. Please stay in character. The host(ess)'s job is to prevent a blood-bath and limit this Q&A session to no more than a few minutes per character. This requires, of course, that you anticipate questions from others, as well as prepare a response to those possible questions. To that end, it should be clear that each person needs to prepare written information and questions on the other participants. You will need to choose two other people for which you will prepare detailed and in-depth information: one should be a person with whom you would most likely **agree**, and the other should be one with whom you would most likely **disagree**. (see attached forms) For all other participants, prepare limited information and questions. After one person presents ideas and fields questions, the moderator will then call on another person to do the same. The process will continue until each person has spoken, then any unfinished discussion will take place.

5) Additional Requirements:

-While I *emphatically* discourage “Your mama...” jokes, intellectual humor and/or wit at someone else’s expense could win points from the judges.

-Questions may come from modern times (although not all of them). Try to keep these responses in their appropriate context. While it is impossible to know how John Locke might have felt about your beloved Red Sox (*not* an A-Rod fan, I’m sure), try to avoid the error of *presentism*

-*Look good*...Dress the part, be it 18th century, modern times, or somewhere in between (translation: gentlemen, you have to dress like a gentleman, i.e. shirt and tie. Ladies, you certainly don’t have to dress like gentlemen...)

-Have fun! If you approach this activity as if you are going for a root canal, it will feel that way. However, if you prepare yourselves and decide to *make* it fun, it will be enjoyable for everyone

Character Sample



Cardinal Bellarmine
Rene Descartes
Thomas Jefferson
Thomas Paine
Denis Diderot
Caesare Beccaria
Adam Smith
Baron de Montesquie
Frederick the Great

John Locke
Immanuel Kant
Voltaire
Baron d'Holbach
Jean Jacques Rousseau
Marquis de Condorcet
Benjamin Franklin
Thomas Hobbes
Catherine the Great

Host(ess) These people have some leg work to do before the day of the salon. Their job is to research ALL of the participants in depth and to read ALL of the prepared monologues before class. On the day of the salon, they will decide on the order of the presentations and provide the transitions from one thinker to the next. They will also have to grade each person's performance/responses.

Hand In

1. one page monologue to me & to the judges *two days prior* to the salon
2. the attached forms about other participants
3. any relevant notes taken before or during the salon
4. Judges – hand in all of your prepared questions, any notes taken during the debate, and a completed scorecard

Character Notes **General**

- 1.Character Name:
2. Student portraying character:
3. Briefly describe how you feel about this character and why

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