

Montesquieu's Moderation: A Liberal Art for the Commercial World

presented by Constantine Vassiliou



Abstract: Montesquieu is well-known as a paragon of the “Moderate Enlightenment”—a promoter of modern commerce and theorist of constitutional balance, whose ideas famously influenced eighteenth-century Scottish and American political thought. However, scholars often overlook his anxieties over the dysfunctional features of modern commerce that equally made it a source of immoderation and political despotism, if left unchecked. In exploring how Montesquieu and key figures of the Scottish Enlightenment confronted the dangers associated with modern commercial culture, Constantine will argue that eighteenth-century political moderation is not merely a legalistic notion, but a deeper, cross-Atlantic vision of how “fellow-feeling” and “empathy” formed the basis of a healthy liberal society. Constantine will discuss Montesquieu’s legacy in America and Modern Greece, and will moreover consider how eighteenth-century ideas of moderation may help enrich current discussions about how varied forms of populism since The Great Recession have raised questions about the viability of democratic politics under the existing liberal economic order.



Constantine Vassiliou (Kinder Institute for Constitutional Democracy)

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Zoom link: <https://iu.zoom.us/j/86482272656>



HAMILTON LUGAR

SCHOOL OF GLOBAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
Institute for European Studies