Classical Reception in 18th Century European Politics and Ideas

This panel examines the reception of classical thought in European political and intellectual discourse during the 18th century. While it has long been understood that the major figures of the Enlightenment era had a respect for, and drew influence from, Greco-Roman antiquity, classicists themselves have not contributed significantly to scholarly analyses of this relationship. Much recent work, while promising, has come from outside the world of classical scholarship (e.g., Nelson 2004, Stuart-Buttle 2019, Edelstein 2019). It is important for classical scholars to interrogate the traces of ancient thought at the root of 18th century ideas, especially given the continuing legacy of Enlightenment intellectualism in the modern world, from rational science to revolutionary politics. This work is all the more urgent in light of the contemporary misuse of classical imagery and iconography by hate groups and supporters of violence against oppressed minorities, whose distortion of ancient culture can in some ways be traced back to Enlightenment ideas and practices.

The goals of this panel are threefold. First, it seeks to call attention to the dearth of classical scholarship on the reception of ancient ideas in 18th century Europe. Second, it intends to address broad cultural parallels common to both antiquity and 18th century Europe in order to better understand Enlightenment interest in Greek and Roman thought. Finally, it hopes to wrest control of the meaning of antiquity from promoters of bigotry and oppression while still holding to account 18th century (and ancient) thinkers for their own misappropriation of ancient culture and hypocritical attitudes.

This panel consists of X papers...

Bibliography

Edelstein, D. 2019. *On the spirit of rights*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nelson, E. 2004. *The Greek tradition in Republican thought*. Cambridge: CUP.

Stuart-Buttle, T. 2019. *From moral theology to moral philosophy*. Oxford: OUP.