

# HI3T5-30 The Material Enlightenment

**26/27**

**Department**

History

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 3

**Module leader**

Michael Bycroft

**Credit value**

30

**Module duration**

22 weeks

**Assessment**

100% coursework

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

---

## Description

### Introductory description

How do we know what to value? How do we distinguish between the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly? This module answers these questions by exploring the material world of the Enlightenment. The period from c. 1650 to 1830 witnessed many new proposals for evaluating the material world, from window-shopping to telescopes. These proposals were part of wider historical processes such as war, consumerism, industrialisation, and the making and remaking of states and empires. To study material evaluation is therefore to study the formation of the modern world. The module covers a wide range of material things, from gold to brandy to horses. We ask how these were judged by men, women, children, slaves, artisans, farmers, bureaucrats, and aristocrats, as well as scientists and engineers. The focus is on Britain and its empire, with several French examples considered as well. We bring these examples to bear on the present, where material evaluation is tied to debates about capitalism, environmentalism, the internet, the humanities, and much else. We bring the material world into the classroom by doing experiments and handling historic objects. We go beyond the classroom as well, holding seminars in a coffeeshop, in a local museum, and elsewhere.

### Module aims

To integrate material evaluation into the history of the Enlightenment

To introduce students to the history of early science and technology, and to the community of

historians who study it

To use historical examples to illuminate present-day debates about value

To engage with theories of value from the social sciences

To engage with literary sources, including maps, diagrams, letters, guild regulations, travel narratives, and scientific books and articles

To engage with the material world in creative ways, including through museum objects, historically significant landscapes, and replications of past experiments and observations

## **Outline syllabus**

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Note: each week focuses on a particular material and a particular context, and asks how that material was evaluated in that context. The exceptions are introduction in week 1 and the conclusion in week 20.

### TERM 1:

1.2 The history of knowledge

1.3 The Age of Reason

1.4 Gold and the Atlantic slave trade

1.5 Sugar and the plantation system

1.6 READING WEEK

1.7 Coffee and Orientalism

1.8 Paintings and the public sphere

1.9 Textiles and the consumer revolution

1.10 Horses, races, and pedigrees

### TERM 2

2.1 Alcohol and the fiscal-military state

2.2 Muskets and the end of the Old Regime

2.3 Jewellery and the Industrial Revolution

2.4 Cotton and the Industrial Revolution

2.5 Wild card - students to decide topic

2.6 READING WEEK

2.7 Mineral water and the growth of towns

2.8 Air and social reform

2.9 Rocks and the discovery of deep time

2.10 Heaven and the discovery of deep space

TERM 3

3.2 Value in the age of smartphones

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a systematic knowledge and understanding of material evaluation in the Enlightenment
- Critically analyse and evaluate a broad range of primary sources relating to material evaluation in the Enlightenment
- Effectively communicate ideas, and make informed, coherent and persuasive arguments, relating to material evaluation in the Enlightenment
- Critically review and consolidate theoretical, methodological, and historiographical ideas relating to material evaluation in the Enlightenment

## Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

## Interdisciplinary

Engages with theories of value from economics, sociology and anthropology

Draws on chemistry, physics and environmental science to recreate the material world of the Enlightenment

## International

Examines case studies that include parts of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the South Pacific, as well as France, Britain and Germany.

## Subject specific skills

See learning outcomes.

## Transferable skills

See learning outcomes.

---

## Study

## Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Tutorials	4 sessions of 1 hour (1%)
Private study	260 hours (87%)
Total	300 hours

## Private study description

Reading preparation for seminars. Reading preparation for assessments. Independent research.

## Costs

Category	Description	Funded by	Cost to student
	One field trip to Birmingham to visit the proof house and assay office. Travel cost is expected to be £13 per student, to cover return train travel to Birmingham. Assuming 25 students go on the trip, this is £325. Students will need to cover the cost of their own bus fare in Birmingham, c. £3.		
Field trips, placements and study abroad	One field trip to a farm/distillery in Kenilworth; students will be expected to cover the cost of bus travel to Kenilworth, c. £3. Materials to cover the cost of a chemical demonstration done with the help of chemists at Warwick. Approx. £50.	Department	£6.00
	Two packets of ground coffee (one Ethiopian arabica, the other Ugandan robusta) to demonstrate the historical significance of coffee varieties, for use during seminar at coffeeshop: £20 in total		
	Total cost to department: Approx. £395 Total cost to each student: £6.		

---

## Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

## Assessment group A3

	<b>Weighting</b>	<b>Study time</b>	<b>Eligible for self-certification</b>
<b>Assessment component</b>			
Seminar contribution	10%		No
<b>Reassessment component</b>			
1000 word reflective essay in lieu of Seminar Contribution			Yes (extension)
1000 Word Reflective Essay			
<b>Assessment component</b>			
In-class test	10%		No
This is a 40-minute paper test that will be done during a seminar near the end of term 1. The test will assess your understanding of the concept of material evaluation. The test will be based on in-class quizzes that will be done in the weeks leading up to the test. The answers will be short (a few sentences) rather than essays.			
<b>Reassessment component</b>			
Book review			Yes (extension)
1500-word review of a book with a focus on material evaluation.			
<b>Assessment component</b>			
3000 word source based essay	40%		Yes (extension)
<b>Reassessment component is the same</b>			
<b>Assessment component</b>			
3000 word essay	40%		Yes (extension)
<b>Reassessment component is the same</b>			

## Feedback on assessment

Written feedback on essays via Tabula

Students will be invited to (optional) office hours to discuss their 1500-word essay and their 3000-word primary source essay

---

## Availability

### Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History
- Year 4 of UENA-VQ33 Undergraduate English and History (with Intercalated year)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
- Year 4 of UHIA-V104 Undergraduate History (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 4 of UHIA-V101 Undergraduate History (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V9 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
- Year 4 of UHIA-VM12 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL17 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL14 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad)

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
- Year 4 of UHIA-V101 Undergraduate History (with Year Abroad)
- Year 4 of UHIA-VM15 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL14 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad)