

On Political Responsibility in Post-Revolutionary Times: Kant and Constant's Debate on Lying

Geneviève Rousselière
The University of Chicago

The author:

Geneviève Rousselière is a Harper Schmidt Fellow and Collegiate Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago. An alumna of the Ecole Normale supérieure in Paris and the University of Paris Panthéon-Sorbonne, she holds a PhD in Politics from Princeton University. Starting Fall 2015, she will be Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She is currently working on her book manuscript, entitled *Sharing Freedom: Republican Democracy from Rousseau to Durkheim*.

The paper:

In "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy," Kant holds the seemingly untenable position that lying is always prohibited, even if the lie is addressed to a murderer in an attempt to save the life of an innocent man. This article argues that Kant's position on lying should be placed back in its original context, namely a response to Benjamin Constant about the responsibility of individual agents toward political principles in post-revolutionary times. I show that Constant's theory of political responsibility, which sanctions the lie, is not based on expediency, but on principled pragmatism, whereas Kant endorses a position that I describe as 'political legalism.' This analysis enables us to uncover two plausible Republican theories of political responsibility in post-revolutionary times behind an apparently strictly ethical debate.