



Key Thinkers Seminar Series 2009

Tuesday November 17, 5 - 6.30pm

Hedley Bull Centre - Theatre HB2

C.F. Volney and the Science of Politics and Morality in Revolutionary France

Alexander Cook

Today, Constantin François Volney is an obscure figure. He was once one of the most prominent philosophers in Europe. Celebrated and reviled in equal measure, this philosopher, historian, linguist, travel writer and politician was for two generations the most widely-read philosopher of the French Revolution. He has been described as the 'Foucault of his age'. His work was banned in many countries, but it was distributed by networks of admirers across Europe and its colonial world. Throughout one of the most turbulent eras in European history, Volney sought to develop a philosophical system which would ground private morality and public governance upon a scientific understanding of the physiology of the human body and the laws of collective life. His attempts to do so, and the context in which those attempts were made, shed light on the genealogy and early politics of the social sciences in Europe.

Dr Alexander Cook is a Lecturer in History in the School of Social Sciences at ANU. He specialises in European cultural and intellectual history. He has published in journals such as *History Workshop*, *Criticism and Sexualities*, and is currently writing a book on Volney and the history of the moral sciences in France.

All Welcome

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