

# University Scholar Lecture Series

## Living Well with Pessimism, Then and Now



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For many, pessimism is closely allied, if not synonymous, with cynicism, nihilism, melancholy, or despair. But pessimism is distinct from all of these other views; it emerged in the “modern” world, entering the French and English languages in the eighteenth century and becoming the subject of vigorous debate in the nineteenth century. This lecture traces those debates among nineteenth-century French nonfiction writers who either lauded its promotion of compassion and a healthy set of limits or condemned it for being a sick and unlivable attempt at renunciation. It then examines the way novelists and poets take up and transform these questions by portraying characters in lived situations that serve as testing grounds for the merits or limitations of pessimism. That debate is still very much with us, and I will end with an argument for embracing pessimism as a way of living well in the world, aesthetically, ethically, and politically.

**February 8, 2021**

**4:30 — 5:30 p.m.**

**Microsoft Teams Live Event**

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