

LS 800: Reflections on Reason and Passion 1

Fall 2020

Wednesdays 5:30-9:30

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This course explores a variety of texts that express or reflect upon the human passions and upon the relationship between those passions and the realms of action, will, and reason. While there is some chronological coherence in the ordering of the texts, the primary intent is to examine issues and themes that reflect human experiences, feelings and behaviours.

Course Requirements:

Following an introduction and a review of contextual issues by the instructor, each week one or more students will be asked to present the salient points or issues (as they relate to passion and reason) raised in one of the readings, followed by general discussion and debate. The week after the class, the student responsible for the animation of the discussion will submit (via e-mail to the class) a two/three-page summary of the presentation and the class discussion.

In addition, there will be two short (5-10 pp) written assignments over the course of the term and students will keep a journal of responses to texts and seminars.

Summer Introductory Seminar

• **Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*** (<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks07/0700021h.html>) or (<https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10092/10501/1%20-%20The%20Oresteia%20of%20Aeschylus%20-%20Agamemnon.pdf?sequence=3>)

or Oxford World's Classics edition

In this family history, Fate and the gods decree that each generation will repeat the crimes and endure the suffering of their forebears. When Agamemnon is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, their son Orestes must avenge his father's death. Only Orestes' appeal to the goddess Athena saves him from his mother's Furies, breaking the bloody chain; together gods and humans inaugurate a way of just conduct that will ensure stable families and a strong community.

PART 1 – ORIGINS IN THE WEST

WEEK 1 (9 SEPTEMBER)

- **Plato** 427-347 BCE, *The Symposium*. A dinner party in Athens with a series of speeches on the philosophy of love, featuring the speech by Socrates in which sensuality is transcended and we move from the sensible to the ideal.
- *The Poetry of Sappho* (610-580 BCE) Called the ‘Tenth Muse’ in ancient Greece, she wrote immortal verse on the intense power of female love; on the themes of romance, yearning, heartbreak, and personal relationships with women. Though her work as survived mostly in fragments, she remains a poet of enduring appeal.

WEEK 2 (16 SEPTEMBER)

- **Aristotle** (384 BCE – 347 BCE), *The Nichomachean Ethics*. An exploration of the nature of happiness, concluding that happiness consists in ‘activity of the soul in accordance with virtue – for example, with moral virtues, such as courage, generosity, and justice, and intellectual virtues, such as knowledge, wisdom and insight.

WEEK 3 (23 SEPTEMBER)

- **Mencius** (excerpts) (compiled in China after 320 BCE) Mencius was a follower of Confucius (551-479 BCE) who helped to formulate a Confucian orthodoxy that has remained deeply influential ever since. His doctrine expounds the basic goodness of human nature and its vulnerability to selfish impulses and advises rulers and subjects on duties and responsibilities.
- **Euripides** (480 BCE-406 BCE) *Medea* Here we are introduced to Jason and his pursuit of the Golden Fleece which required the help of a ‘dark’ woman with secret ‘powers’ (Medea) to obtain. He marries her, has two children and then, in a rather clumsy way, decides to marry a king’s daughter so that a city can be his. Medea is enraged and violence follows.

PART 2 ROMAN AND MEDIEVAL ERAS

WEEK 4 (30 SEPTEMBER)

- **Lucretius** 100 BCE -55 BCE *On the Nature of the Universe*. This work of Lucretius, originally in a long poem form, is regarded as a seminal text of Epicurean science and philosophy. Included in the work are critiques of religious beliefs, the idea of the indestructibility of atoms, the story of the discovery of fire, the folly of romantic love, how eyesight works and the phenomena of clouds and rainstorms.

WEEK 5 (7 OCTOBER)

- **Marcus Aurelius** (CE 121 – 180) *Meditations*. During his campaigns against barbarian tribes the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote these famous meditations. Trained in Stoic philosophy, he recorded passing thoughts and maxims, musing on life and death, friendship and the qualities involved in being a leader. Stoicism shared a great many ideas with Epicureanism, the other philosophic school of the Hellenistic era.

- **Dante** (CE 1265-1290) *The Divine Comedy: Vol. 1 Inferno* (excerpts) Dante the pilgrim finds himself alone in a 'dark wood' when a shade-like figure resembling the Roman poet Virgil, sent by Dante's love Beatrice to guide him to safety. But Virgil tells him that the only route out is via first descending into Hell, and so we proceed.

WEEK 6 (OCTOBER 14)

- **Saint Augustine, Confessions.** After a struggle of some 30 years with various experiments in forms of religious beliefs and equally various licentious behaviours, Augustine (CE 354-430) in his Confessions describes the complex path that led him in 387 to Christian belief. He was later made Bishop of Hippo in North Africa.

- **Rumi** (CE 1207 – 1273) *Selected Poems.* A Persian philosopher, mystic, scholar and founder of the order of the Whirling Dervishes, Rumi was as well a poet of transcendental power. His poetry speaks of tolerance, goodness, the experience of God, charity and awareness through love and remains popular with readers worldwide.

PART 3 FROM RENAISSANCE TO ENLIGHTENMENT

SATURDAY CLASS (17 OCTOBER 10:00 AM TO NOON)

- **Niccolo Machiavelli** (1469-1527), *The Prince* – A radical and at the time shocking break toward the modern sense of statecraft and politics, Machiavelli made pragmatism and success trump virtue and honour in his advice to the Prince in the small states of what was then the Italian peninsula, not yet 'Italy'.

WEEK 7 (21 OCTOBER)

- **Thomas More** (1477-1535) *Utopia.* More envisioned a patriarchal island kingdom that practiced religious tolerance, in which everybody worked, no one had more than his fellows, all goods were community owned and violence, bloodshed and vice nonexistent.

- **Moliere** (1622-1673) *The Misanthrope.* A classic (and comedic) look at the dangers too great a notion of sincerity or complete openness and as well a critique of the various socially created masks we wear in human interactions.

WEEK 8 (28 OCTOBER)

- **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1711 – 1778) *Reveries of the Solitary Walker.* After a period of forced exile and solitary wandering brought about by his radical views on religion and politics (and many other prevailing issues), Rousseau returned to Paris and became more introspective in his attempt to come to grips with modern alienation. The ten reveries explore in turn the issues that he faced in the last years of his life.

- **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749-1832) *The Sorrows of Young Werther.* A 'best seller' in its day, this is the story of a young man driven to suicide by an unhappy love affair – at least that is part of the story. Looking further it is a young man who is a sensitive artist who for many reasons cannot get along in the society he is faced with.

WEEK 9 (4 NOVEMBER)

- **Mary Wollstonecraft** (1759-1797) **Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark**

Her most popular book, an account of her travels through these countries in 1796 while on a mission for her then partner, Gilbert Imlay. Her travels across the dramatic landscape result in sublime and romantic descriptions of the natural world along with political and social commentary.

REMEMBRANCE DAY – NO CLASS

WEEK 10 (18 NOVEMBER)

- **Jane Austen** (1775-1817) **Mansfield Park** The most difficult or at least contentious of Austen's novels, the story of conflict between a rather crass and urban modernity with the settled landed family of Sir Thomas Bertram (whose income comes via Caribbean slavery).

Foreshadowing a theme often played out in Dostoevsky's work, the central figure is a young woman whose core values prevail.

PART 4 BECOMING MODERN

WEEK 11 (25 NOVEMBER)

- **Fyodor Dostoevsky** (1821-1881) **Notes from Underground** One of his early stories focusing on what it is like to be on the 'outside' of the culture you are part of and to perceive things that are oblivious to others. An early version of *Crime and Punishment's* Raskolnikov.

- **Virginia Woolf** (1882-1941) **A Room of One's Own** Another view from the 'outside', but this time a situation forced upon one on the basis of gender. Woolf explores the problem and suggests a solution.

WEEK 12 (2 DECEMBER)

- **Peter Sloterdick**, **Stress and Freedom**. A discussion of the concept of freedom from Ancient Greece to the present.
- **Byung-Chulhan**, **Psycho-Politics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power**. An exploration of a contemporary crisis of freedom stemming from the technological of 'data'.