

LS 800 – Reflections on Reason & Passion I

Fall 2023 – Tuesday/Thursday 6:30 to 9:20

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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 in instances of choice and decision-making.

In order to facilitate discussions here will be two sections of the LS 800 course, one group meeting on Tuesday evenings and the second group on Thursday evenings. Since students in the two sections are members of the 2023 GLS cohort, there will four weeks when the two groups meet in common on Wednesday evening.

Course Requirements:

Prior to each seminar discussion you are to send to me via e-mail a two to three-page ‘response’ to the readings of that week, focusing an assessment of how the readings addressed the issue of the relation between reason and passion in human affairs. As well, include one question concerning one of the readings that you think would be useful in provoking discussion in our seminars.

Summer Introductory Seminar- 20 August from 6:30-9:00

The *Letters of Abelard and Heloise* are a series of personal letters written in the middle years of the 12th century between Peter Abelard, a French scholastic philosopher and the French nun Heloise, philosopher, writer and abbess. They had fallen in love, married and had a son before being driven apart by members of Heloise’s family, driving Abelard to become a monk. The Letters begin with her attempt to re-engage after a long separation. The Letters will provide us with a clear sense of how reason can so often clash with passion/feeling.

Part 1 – Origins in the Ancient West

Week 1 (Section 1: 5 September/Section 2: 7 September)

• **Plato** 427-347 BCE, *The Phaedrus* – In this Dialogue Plato is making the point that while the Phaedrus is written, it is actually a ‘conversation’, or at least an imagined conversation. And I would imagine in turn that Plato would have hoped that as others read the written text they would in effect be continuing the conversation by agreeing, disagreeing or finding issues that drove them to seek clarity. So, in our class we are collectively going to engage in a conversation about the Phaedrus, and especially by exploring how the ideas presented in the written text are relevant to the world we live in 2,500 years later.

- **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 (Section 1:12 September/Section 2: 14 September)

- **Sophocles, Antigone** (441 BCE). A young woman’s strong sense of specific cultural values comes into conflict with rigid political norms in ancient Thebes. A woman alone defying the power of the state.

- **Euripides, Medea** (431 BCE). Based on the story of Jason and his Argonauts stealing the Golden Fleece with the help of the sorceress Medea. In the play Jason marries Medea and they have two children, both of whom Medea eventually kills when Jason betrays her and marries a local princess.

Week 3 (Section 1: 19 September/Section2: 21 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.

Part 2 Roman and Early Modern Eras

Week 4 (Section 1: 3 October/Section 2: 5 October)

- **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 (Section 1: 26 September: Section 2: 28 September)

- **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.

Week 6 (In-Person Weekend 13/14 October)

For those who are able to meet in-person at the GLS Seminar Room we will open the discussion of St. Augustine following a group dinner on Friday (13 October) and finish on Saturday morning, 14 October. For those not able to meet in Vancouver we will have a Zoom class on Sunday, 15 October from 6:30-8:30 pm.

- **St. Augustine, Confessions** (354-430 CE) Augustine tells of his struggles to master his sexual drive, his rare ascent to the Imperial Court of Milan, and his renunciation of secular

ambition and marriage as he recovered the faith that his mother had taught him. It was in garden in Milan that he finally achieved the act of will to Christian conversion. As well a review of our earlier discussion of the **Letters of Abelard and Heloise**

Week 7 (Section 1: 17 October/Section 2: 19 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.

Week 8 (Sections 1 & 2: Wednesday 25 October)

• **Machiavelli, The Prince** (1513 CE) When reading *The Prince* please try to ‘glide over’ all the details concerning local Italian 15th century politics as well as the numerous examples he cites from ancient history in order to focus on the ‘larger’ issue of Machiavelli as defining the ‘modern’ issue of power/people/luck. Also try to think about his notions of ‘human nature’ and how they do, or do not compare to current ideas, or your personal idea.

Part 3 The Enlightenment

Week 9 (Sections 1 & 2: Wednesday 1 November)

• **Rene Descartes** (1596-1650, *A Discourse on Method*). Stressing the doubt that remains implicit in philosophy and the science of the classical era, Descartes developed a method that he argued could lead to truth. Known for the development of ‘rationalism’ as opposed to the reliance on ‘reason’.

• **Immanuel Kant** (1724-1814 CE) “**What Is Enlightenment?**” Kant saw the Enlightenment as man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance. ... "Have the courage to use your own understanding," is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment.

Week 10 (Section 1: 7 November/Section 2: 9 November)

• **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1711 – 1778) *A Discourse on Inequality* and the **Fifth Walk in the Reveries of the Solitary Walker**.

Rousseau’s second important bit of writing (1755) that sets out his theory of how the growth of civilization corrupts the natural happiness and freedom of humankind by creating artificial inequalities of wealth, power, and social privilege. The 5th Walk in his *Reveries* was composed toward the end of his life in 1778.

Week 11 (Section 1: 14 November/Section 2: 16 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.

Week 12 (Sections 1 & 2: 22 November)

Mary Shelley (1797-1851), **Frankenstein**. Mary was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin and married the poet Percy Shelley in 1816. Her first novel, *Frankenstein* is a Gothic novel in part but also a philosophical treatise based on the ideas of Rousseau, Godwin, Shelley and others. For our purposes it is also a story of ‘reason’ gone wrong.

Week 13 (Sections 1 & 2: 29 November)

This will be a summative discussion of our discussions from Plato to Mary Shelley in relation to two very modern ‘essays’, Peter Sloterdijk, *Stress and Freedom* (2016) and Byung-chul Han, *The Disappearance of Rituals* (2020).