

LS801 Passion and Reason, Spring 2024
Harbour Centre, Simon Fraser University
Wednesdays 6:30 to 9:20 pm
Eleanor (Ellie) Stebner – Online Course
estebner@sfu.ca

Humans have struggled through the centuries with understanding their lives – the limitations and glories of them – and the interplay between their desires and emotions with discipline, order, and certainties. While David Hume says in his well-known quote that “reason is and ought only to be the slave of passions” (*Treatise on Human Nature*), both reason and passion motivate human actions. The texts in this course provide students with ample opportunities to ponder these two inclinations.

Course requirements

Each student will lead one seminar presentation (about 15 minutes) on a specific text. Do not simply rehash the reading. Rather, highlight the major themes of the work as it relates to passion and reason. Utilize short direct quotations and page numbers, if helpful. Finally, provide three or four succinct questions for group discussion.

When a text does not have a student presenter, all students are to prepare at least one question for group discussion.

Toward the end of the term, students will discuss with their peers the topic and direction of their term essay. The essay (12 to 15 pages) is due on April 10th, our final class gathering.

NOTES:

The instructor will email students required PDFs and any other additional materials. (Canvas will not be used.)

January 9th/11th

Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War* (5th c. BCE)

John Minford, ed. and trans., p. 3-95.

https://archive.org/details/artofwar0000sunz_f719/mode/2up

War is all about strategy and outmaneuvering one's opponents.

This classic Chinese text has been read through the centuries and has, in recent years, been studied by corporate “wannabes.”

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (411 BCE)

Thomas Crofts, 1994, Dover Books.

https://archive.org/details/lysistrata0000aris_g8g6/mode/2up

The men are fighting and Lysistrata persuades the women of the warring Athens and Sparta states to withhold sex from them until they stop the silliness of war.

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

January 16th/18th

Ecclesiastes (4th to 2nd c. BCE)

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=2559564>

Part of the Wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible, scholars continue to debate as to why it ever made it into the canon. It has had a significant influence on literature and music.

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

Bhagavad Gita (late 3rd/2nd c. BCE)

Laurie Patton, trans., first through eighteenth discourse.

PDF provided.

Life is about decisions and sacred obligation. Robert Oppenheim quoted from the *Gita* after watching the first atomic explosion in July 1945: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

January 24th (Wed)

Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Muhammad: A Very Short Introduction*
Oxford University Press, 2011.

<https://archive.org/details/muhammadveryshor00brow>

The first part of this text is a digest of the earliest biography written in the 8th century on Muhammad (d. 632 CE). It then discusses the various interpretations of Muhammed and his continuing importance in today's world.

January 30th/
February 1st

The Song of Roland (11th c. CE)

Jessie Crosland trans., 1999.

PDF provided.

An extremely popular epic poem in the Middle Ages depicting a battle between Christians and Muslims in Spain. It is a tale that portrays good, evil, honour, treachery, pride, and stupidity.

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

Selected Writings, Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179)

PDF provided.

A Benedictine abbess, Hildegard was a mystic and polymath who wrote on theology, philosophy, medicine, creation, and politics, as well as composing music.

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

February 6th/8th

Watch “Dante: The First Renaissance Man” (2013)

A documentary on Dante Alighieri by Malcolm Hossick.

Online with the SFU library.

Dante, *Infernal* (1314)

Mark Musa trans., Penguin Books, 1971.

<https://archive.org/details/dantesinferno00dant/mode/2up?view=theater>

The first volume of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the *Infernal* is a trip through the nine circles of hell, guided by the ancient Roman poet Virgil.

February 14th (Wed)

Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542)

Nigel Griffin, trans., Penguin Press, 1992.

PDF provided.

A report written to Prince Philip II about the mistreatment and slaughter of indigenous peoples by the Spanish conquistadors. All for “god, gold, and glory.” (Or however you want to order them.)

Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal* (1729)

PDF provided.

An essay proposing a well-reasoned economic and social solution to the poverty of the Irish, and for the good of the entire country, of course. (Satire.)

February 23rd

Reading break – no seminar

February 27th/29th

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)

PDF provided.

History is a series of class struggles, but in the end, capitalism will self-destruct and be replaced by a workers’ society. “Workingmen [women] of all countries unite.”

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859)

PDF provided.

A foundational text weighing the rights of minorities versus majorities, authority, and liberty.

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

March 5th/7th

Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilich* (1886)

<https://open.lib.umn.edu/ivanilich/chapter/full-text-english/>

Ilich (Ilyich) has led a conformist life seeking middle-class comforts, status, and security, but he is now dying. And (almost) everyone around him carries on as if nothing is happening.

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892)

https://archive.org/details/yellowwallpaper0000gilm_b5r5/mode/2up

Shortly after giving birth to a baby, the mother experiences a mental breakdown, and her doctor husband—a controlling know-it-all—insists on her taking a “rest-cure.” (Not good.)

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

March 12th/14th

Sigmund Freud, *On Civilization and its Discontents* (1930)

Christopher Hitchens, intro., James Strachey, trans., 2010.

https://archive.org/details/civilizationitsd0000freu_w3o8

Written in the aftermath of World War I and during the rise of overt anti-Semitism in Austria/Germany, Freud addresses the tensions between individuals and societies.

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz [If This Is a Man]* (1947/1958)

https://archive.org/details/survivalinauschw0000levi_d7w5

A haunting memoir of Levi’s deportation and survival in Auschwitz Birkenau. What makes a human human? And how can this be stripped away?

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

March 22nd/23rd

In person weekend

Friday, 22nd

7 pm, lecture by Adam Gopnik, SFU Woodward

Saturday, 23rd

In person seminar

Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (1981)

https://archive.org/details/obasan0000koga_01q3

The Canadian government's internment and relocation of Japanese women, men, and children during WWII and its painful ramifications for individuals and communities.

Tomson Highway, *The Rez Sisters* (1986)

PDF provided.

Seven women who live on a reserve in Ontario all dream of winning the "biggest bingo in the world" and do a road-trip to Toronto. The first Canadian theatre play with an indigenous cast.

March 26th/28th

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2003)

<https://archive.org/details/persepolis-2005/mode/2up>

An autobiographical graphic novel about growing up in Iran before, during, and after the Islamic Revolution, as well as the effects of the war with Iraq.

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

Sayaka Murata, *Convenience Store Woman* (2016)

<https://archive.org/details/convenience-store-woman/mode/2up?view=theater>

Keiko Furukura is a misfit, but she loves her part-time job at the Smile Mart where she knows what rules and procedures to follow. She's happy without sex, marriage, or children.

Presenter (Tuesday):

Presenter (Thursday):

April 3rd (Wed)

Susan Neiman, *Left is Not Woke* (2023)

What is the legacy of the Enlightenment? Do victims of atrocities have special authority because of their victimhood? What about universal values in the face of particularities? Questions, questions, questions.

April 10th (Wed)

Final discussion/final essays due