

**ENGL 273 / HUMS 406**  
**THE POLITICS OF EMOTION AND SENSIBILITY**

**Introduction**

Political theory is generally concerned with rational deliberation, but of course politics is also a matter of feeling and sensing. Supporting a cause, joining a movement, even simply responding to the political claims that are implicit in many elements of our daily experience - each of these involves not merely our reason, narrowly conceived, but also our emotions, our aesthetic sensibilities, and our widest sensory habits of evaluation and response. This seminar is an opportunity to think deeply about emotions and sensibilities, especially as they bear on political life. Our method will be highly interdisciplinary, and our reading will range widely in philosophy, literary criticism, and literature, from Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, to Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, to contemporary Anglophone poetry. Our aim will be to come to a better understanding both of the role that emotions and sensibilities play in our political lives, and also of the political implications of different ways of theorizing emotions and sensibilities.

The seminar is structured in three parts. The first part is an introduction to the philosophy of the emotions. Here we will address ourselves to key philosophical texts dealing with the emotions, asking questions such as: How do emotions influence our beliefs? Are emotions irrational? What are the political implications of theorizing emotions in one way, rather than another? The second part of the seminar is an introduction to the question of sensibility. Here we will address ourselves to key texts in the aesthetic and literary-critical traditions, asking questions such as: What is sensibility, and what is its role in politics? How do our daily habits of aesthetic evaluation come to determine our political judgements? What are the political implications of theorizing sensibility in one way, rather than another? The final part of the seminar will examine the distinctive features, origin, and impact of a number of emotions and sensibilities: our case studies will include love, compassion, one's sense of one's place in history, and one's attitude toward politicization. Here, we will be reading philosophical and theoretical analyses of these particular emotions and attitudes, as well as literary texts - particularly poems - that attempt to provoke, evoke, or complicate the stance in question. By the end of the course, we will hope to have gained a much richer understanding of some of the crucial ways in which questions of emotion and sensibility bear on our common political life.

**Instructors:** Giulia Oskian and Joseph North

**Class Time and Location:** Tuesday 1.30-3.20 WHC B-02

**Office Hours:** TBA

**Requirements**

- Attendance
- Proven coverage of the readings assigned for each class
- Sensitive and thoughtful participation in class discussions
- Three 5 page essays.

Each of the three papers will be worth 30% of the final grade, with participation counting for 10 %.

**N.B.** Assigned readings do not exceed 80 pages per week. This is a deliberate choice intended to allow students to engage in a reflective reading of the assigned texts. Students are therefore required to read the materials carefully.

## Schedule of Readings

### Part I: A Political Philosophy of Emotions

#### Week 1 (Sept 5)

##### Introduction

- A. Hochschild, excerpts from *Strangers in Their Own Land*
- Federico Garcia Lorca, excerpts from *Poet in New York*

#### Week 2 (Sept 12)

##### Passions of Social Animals

- A. Smith, excerpts from *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*
- J.J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*
- B. Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*, ch.8: 'From Sincerity to Authenticity'

#### Week 3 (Sept 19)

##### Emotions and Political Imagination

- E. Burke, excerpts from *Reflections on the Revolution in France*
- Tocqueville, excerpts from *Democracy in America*
- K. Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

##### Suggested

- D. Bromwich, 'Moral Imagination'
- M. Berman, excerpts from *All That Is Solids Melts Into Air*

#### Week 4 (Sept 26)

##### Emotions in Social Groups

- S. Freud, excerpts from *Civilization and Its Discontents*
- S. Freud, *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego*
- R. Musil, excerpts from *The Man Without Qualities*

#### Week 5 (Oct 3)

##### The Philosophy of Emotions

- E. De Sousa, 'The Rationality of Emotions'
- M. Nussbaum, excerpts from *Upheavals of Thought*
- R. Solomon, 'The Logic of Emotion'
- P. Greenspan, 'A Case of Mixed Feelings: Ambivalence and the Logic of Emotion'

## Part II: The Politics of Taste, Culture, Sensibility

### Week 6 (Oct 10)

#### Introduction to Public Taste, Common Sense, and Sensibility

- William Wordsworth, "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*.
- Sophia Rosenfield, excerpts from *Common Sense: A Political History*
- Raymond Williams, excerpts from *Keywords*: "Common," "Community," "Communism," "Aesthetic," "Art" "Culture," and "Sensibility"
- I.A. Richards, excerpts from *Principles of Literary Criticism*

### Week 7 (Oct 17)

#### Culture vs Protest: The Hyde Park Affair

- *The Manchester Guardian*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1866, "The Disturbances in Hyde Park"
- Matthew Arnold, excerpts from "Culture and Anarchy"
- John Stuart Mill, excerpts from various parliamentary speeches relating to the Hyde Park Affair
- Raymond Williams, excerpts from *Politics and Letters*

-- October Recess --

### Week 8 (Oct 24)

#### Culture and Sensibility: Conservative and Liberal Views

- T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; "The Function of Criticism"
- F.R. Leavis, "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture"
- Perry Anderson, excerpts from "Components of the National Culture" (1968)
- Lionel Trilling, the "Function of the Little Magazine"

### Week 9 (Oct 31)

#### Culture and Sensibility: Radical Views

- Raymond Williams, excerpts from *Culture and Society* and from *Keywords*: "Aesthetic," "Art"
- William Morris, "The Lesser Arts," "Useful Work vs Useless Toil," "How I Became A Socialist"
- Excerpts from Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury*

### Part III: Case Studies of Four Political Emotions / Sensibilities

#### Week 10 (Nov 7)

##### Love

- G. Anders, excerpts from *Love Yesterday. Notes on The History of Feelings*
- E. Illouz, excerpts from *Why Love Hurts? A Sociological Explanation*
- E.M. Forster, excerpts from *Two Cheers for Democracy*
- A selection of love poems from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

#### Week 11 (Nov 14)

##### Compassion

- J. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 'Introduction' and ch. 1: 'Putting Cruelty First?'
- M. Nussbaum, excerpts from *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*
- Bertolt Brecht, "On Chinese Acting"
- A selection of poems by Brecht, Szymborska, Brecht, Harford, Thomas

-- November Recess --

#### Week 12 (Nov 28)

##### Historical Sensibility

- A selection of poems about sensing one's place in history, by Yeats, Szymborska, Heaney, Auden, Brecht, Lorde

#### Week 13 (Dec 5)

##### Politicized Sensibility

- A selection of anti-activist writings by William Wordsworth, W.B. Yeats, Milan Kundera, Virginia Woolf, Wislawa Szymborska,
- A selection of pro-activist writings by Martin Luther King Jr., Pablo Neruda, Federico Garcia Lorca, Lesbia Harford, Audre Lorde