First-Year Seminar 13: *Erôs* and Insight

Fayerweather Hall 117 & TBA    Professors Upton and Zajonc
T/Th 11:30-12:50    Fayerweather Hall 208

Merrill Science Center 226

Office hours: TBA

What would it be like to experience yourself, those around you and the world through deliberate and disciplined contemplation?

This seminar will define and then explore contemplative knowing as attentiveness, openness and the act of sustaining contradiction. By this means we will seek common ground between the seemingly opposed realities of art and science, *erôs* and insight. We will conclude by re-imagining together Plato’s famous Symposium on the question of love.

The following books are available at the Jeffery Amherst College Bookstore, 26 South Prospect Street. You may read each of them during the course of the semester at your own discretion, but be sure to have completed these readings by the dates listed below. Although all five of these books attend to the question of love, they vary greatly in tone and complexity. As a group they are meant to provide a shared background against which each of us may measure the weekly progress of the seminar. Notes taken as part of your reading in these texts, or in other assigned readings, and any commentary you might wish to include should be typed and prepared to be handed in at various times during the semester. Given the scheduled trajectory of our seminar, these readings might well proceed as listed, beginning with *Tuesdays with Morrie* and *All about Love* which should be completed by the mid-semester break (October 11-15). The *Symposium* will focus our attention during weeks 11-12 (November 18 - December 12). *Love and Living* and *On Love and other Difficulties* will help to inform as well as point beyond the final weeks of the seminar. Other very brief readings in xerox format (distributed in class) will accompany particular subjects during the seminar.

Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Bell Hooks, *All about Love*

Plato, *The Symposium*, translation by C. Gill

Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, (especially pp. 3-94)


1. September 2 - 4: Introduction
Tuesday: Who are you? Aspirations...intellectual, academic, personal? Silence...

**Essay 1: Characterize your experience of being silent. One page.**

**Due: Tuesday, September 9.** This and every other essay for FYS 13 should be carefully written and typed, using at least two preliminary drafts which will be due in class at the specified date along with your final draft.

Thursday: Description and purpose of FYS13

II. September 9 - 11: Ways of Knowing - “Art” and “Science”... departure

Tuesday: Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), Contemplating the Cosmos, part one


Thursday: Johannes Kepler, Contemplating the Cosmos, part two

III. September 16 - 18: Ways of Knowing - “Art” and “Science”... departure

Tuesday: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer*, part one

Thursday: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer*, part two

**Essay 2: Based on the two exemplars, Rembrandt and Kepler: (1) how do “art” and “science” appear to be different as ways of knowing the world; and (2) how might you suggest that they are simultaneously similar; and (3) are they more alike or different? One page. Due: Tuesday, September 23**

IV. September 23 -25: Sections - Introducing the Contemplative Self

**N.B. All sections of FYS 13 will meet twice, once with Professor Upton and once with Professor Zajonc in locations to be announced**

Continued ...

Tuesday/Thursday: Separation and Longing
Reading: Oliver Sacks, “The Mind’s Eye,” The New Yorker, 7/28/03, pp. 48-59

Exercise: Construct a value and neutral color chart
Instructions to be given in class. Due: Tuesday, September 30

V. September 30 - October 2: Engaging the Contemplative Self - I

Tuesday: Value and Color

Thursday: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe - Color and the Metamorphosis of Science

Reading: J. W. von Goethe, Goethe’s Scientific Studies (selections)

Essay 3: (a) How were attentiveness and openness instrumental in your construction of your value and neutral color chart? (b) What role did they play in Goethe’s Scientific Studies? One page. Due: Tuesday, October 7

VI. October 7 - 9: Sections - Contemplative Knowing

Tuesday/Thursday: Measuring Contradiction - Mondrian and Einstein

Essay 4: Pick three lines from either Tuesdays with Morrie or All about Love and one line from the other and relate them to the emerging themes of FYS 13. One page. Due: Thursday, October 16

Mid-Semester Break
(October 11-15)

VII. October 16: Engaging the Contemplative Self - II

Thursday: Horizontal and Vertical - Embracing the Obverse


VIII. October 21 - 23: Engaging the Contemplative Self - III

Tuesday: Pythagoras - Intimations of Reconciliation
Reading: Morris Kline, *Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty* (selections)

Thursday: Hendrick van Vliet - “Waiting”

IX. October 28 - 30: Sections - Sustaining Contradiction

Tuesday/Thursday: Neils Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Barbara McClintok, Georgia O’Keefe and Ryoan-ji in Kyoto, Japan

Reading: E., F. Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock* (selections)

Essay 5: Characterize your experience of sustaining contradiction, drawing on an instance in your own life. One page. Due: Tuesday, November 4

X. November 4 - 6: Erôs and Insight

Tuesday: Courtly Love - The Forgotten Invention

Reading: C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (pp.1-23)

Thursday: Inner Dialogue

Reading: Marguerite Porette, *The Mirror of the Simple Soul* (selections)

XI. November 11 - 13: Sections - Erôs and Insight

Tuesday/Thursday: Solitude


Essay 6: (1) How does the direct challenge to “Love love and do as you will” realize erôs and insight as “contemplative knowing?” (2) Give one example of this subtle understanding of love and action in Rilke, Merton and your own experience. Two pages. Due: Tuesday, November 18

XII. November 18 - 20: Love, Desire and the Refinement of the Soul

Tuesday: *The Symposium*, Part one
Reading: Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 3 - 31

Thursday: *The Symposium*. Part one

Reading: Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 32 - 64

XIII. December 2 - 4: Love, Desire and the Refinement of the Soul

Tuesday: Diotima’s ladder

Thursday: Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*

XIV. December 9: *Erôs* and Insight = Love

Tuesday: Love, Education and Transformation

Reading: T. Merton, *Love and Living*, pp. 3 - 14; 25 - 37
R. M. Rilke, *On Love and other Difficulties*, pp. 115 - 117
T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”

Essay 7: How might FYS 13 cause you to re-imagine how you will construct your education from this point forward? Be specific in your accommodation to the enduring dynamic relation of *erôs* and insight as the basis of contemplative knowing. Four pages. Due: Monday, December 15
FYS 13 at a glance

I. Introduction

Our central purpose is to introduce a way of knowing: namely, contemplative knowing (defined here as attentiveness, openness, embracing the obverse and sustaining contradiction) which in turn becomes erôs and insight. Together, erôs and insight comprise “love.” This re-imagined love (as contrasted with impoverished, sentimental, counterfeit, self-satisfying “love”) constitutes a way of being in the word. As such, it provides an enduring foundation for education and continuing self-transformation. Hence FYS 13 is, with Rilke, the beginning of the beginning, as all true love is always a beginning. T.S. Eliot’s “Quick, now, here, now always” centers contemplative knowing enduringly in each of us.

II. Art and Science

We challenge the modern habitual separation of “art” and “science” as arbitrary. Exclusively rationalized constructions that emerged in the 17th century departed from earlier traditions of inclusiveness and a common human aspiration that comprises paradox and contradiction. By way of a self-reflection contemplative knowing, art and science re-emerge as distinct but superficially different ways of knowing, transcended by a commonality of human longing for wholeness. This longing arises from an acknowledged condition of conscious, i.e. mortal fragmentation (Adam and Eve, the Fall, various creation myths including the Timaeus and others).

III. Discovering and Engaging the Contemplative Self

1. Coming home to an awareness of conscious self-separation and longing (to be is to be separate; molding the self).
2. Pursing attentiveness, openness and a deliberate capacity to sustain contradiction by way of direct experience (in the construction and contemplation of a value and color intensity chart; in seeing/contemplating color through a prism; in contemplating horizontal/vertical/ diagonal, the liminal, etc.).
3. Accepting the dynamic reality of distinction/difference/contradiction; of sensory perception and rational/irrational/non-rational ordering; of practice and theory; of erôs and insight; of separation and longing as the very basis of conscious being.
4. Recognizing true “knowing” as our “wandering mourning” (Rilke), one form of which Rilke calls our “killing.”
5. Arriving at an awareness of the healing necessity to overcome (redeem?) the “murderous” potential we all possess (in consciousness/the Fall), even in the seemingly benign forms of ideology (clarity/certainty/exclusivity), of art, science, “I,” “he,” “she,” “it.” Seeking complementarity, coincidence of opposites, “Beholding,” love.

IV. Erôs and Insight = Love

1. Courtly love: C.S. Lewis and “Love love and do as you will.”
2. Love in Solitude (standing guard over infinitely separated solitudes as contrasted with sentimental and false unities).
3. The Symposium: Diotima’s ladder not as an escape from the dilemma, but its sublimation. The “ladder, the “stairway as love” that would diminish the “killing of our wandering mourning.”
4. Coming home: Rembrandt’s Return of the Prodigal Son and T.S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding”: “Quick, now, here, now, always.”
5. Knowing/knowledge and unfolding consciousness.