

An Intellectual History of the Imagination: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

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The Romantics invested the human power of imagination with unprecedented creative and cognitive roles and made it the centre of man's aesthetic, moral, and philosophical life. They also created a polemical dichotomy between reason and imagination and accused the preceding age of a guilty cult of dry, calculative reason. But the imagination in its relation with the other powers of the mind has a long pre-Romantic history that is much more nuanced and rich than a Romantic-inspired history would have it. This course looks at the richness of the concept of imagination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with particular focus on the English space.

C17: We will look at the way in which the imagination is addressed not only in poetic-rhetorical works but also has a central role in moral, theological, scientific and medical thought: the imagination collects, combines, and divides the images of corporeal things received from the senses; it can receive the influence of the heavenly bodies or of spiritual beings; it closely collaborates with the material spirits of the body and can thus carry or cure diseases of both body and mind; it works together with the passions and as such can have both deleterious and beneficial effects on one's affective and cognitive life.

C18: We will investigate the place of the imagination in the emerging aesthetic theory of the period and its relationships with notions such as 'taste', 'wit' and 'genius'. We will ask whether the aesthetic domain of inquiry is born as an autonomous realm or whether its debts to other domains, such as moral thought and theology, are constitutive of its inception. We will also look at the revaluation of the imagination in the eighteenth-century 'science of man', as compared with previous philosophical psychology and anthropology, as well as its relationship with notions such as 'sympathy' and 'moral sense'.

We will work on several primary texts that illustrate these dimensions of the early modern imagination. Students will thus be introduced to the interdisciplinary domain of intellectual history; will learn to ask questions about human health, morality and creativity that cross the boundaries of literature, philosophy and science; and will reflect on the way the thinking of the past may illuminate the interrogations of the present.

The primary material includes selections from: Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry* (1595); Pierre Charron, *Of Wisdome Three Bookes* (1606); Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of Man* (1640); Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661); The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711); Joseph Addison, "The Pleasures of the Imagination", *The Spectator* 411-414 (1712); Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759); Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Genius* (1774); Thomas Reid, *Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785).

Technical details: 50% mandatory attendance; debate-focused classes; end-of-term essay.