

# Representations of Human Nature: An Intellectual Historical Approach

3<sup>rd</sup>-Year Elective  
Prof. Sorana Corneanu  
Fridays, 2-4 pm

This year's course will approach the question of human nature from the perspective of historical conceptions of education associated with the idea of fulfilling the human potential. We will discuss texts devoted to study, reading and teaching that made an impact on European and American thought from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, and will place them in their intellectual and cultural contexts. We will do so with a twofold aim: to understand the historical transformations of the ideas we will look at, and to reflect on our contemporary attitudes to the same issues.

Our texts include late Renaissance writings on study, reading and education (Michel de Montaigne and Francis Bacon); early modern and Enlightenment accounts of practices for the "improvement of the mind" and of the idea of "liberal education" (John Locke, Isaac Watts, George Turnbull, Thomas Reid); Victorian interventions in the debate around the teaching of "literature and science" (Thomas Huxley and Matthew Arnold); and twentieth-century reflections on teaching in general (John Dewey and Bertrand Russell).

Format: short lectures followed by guided discussion.

Requirements: a genuine interest in the theme of this course; a tested capacity for steady engagement with study and reflection; a taste for perusing historical materials; the ability to attend at least 50% of the meetings.

Evaluation: end-of-term essay (ca. 2000 words).