

Emotions and Human Flourishing
PTPC 95423/75423/85423
Brite Divinity School
Fall 2021
3 semester hours

Instructor: Barbara J. McClure, Ph.D.
Associate Professor: Pastoral Theology and Practice

Prerequisites: This is an advanced course for first Masters students; it may also include second Masters students and doctoral students.

Description of Content:

Emotions and their complements (affect, passions, moods, feelings) have become the subject of study attracting significant interest among scholars across many spectra, including historians, social scientists, philosophers, and literary critics. Identifying, understanding and managing our emotional states has become big business, from pastoral counseling to business executive coaching. However, our relationships to the emotions in our lives is mixed: on the one hand we know that they can bear deep truths about us and our experiences. On the other, we sense—at least intuitively—that they ought not be wholly trusted. Indeed, emotions can deceive and mislead us; they motivate violence, exclusion, greed, and oppression. They are often manipulated for others' gain (for example, in advertising) and used against us (think, for example, of the fear-mongering and Islamophobia in the contemporary political rhetoric in the US), contributing to systems of oppression that limit the flourishing of us all. For these reasons among others perhaps, our relationships to and assessments of emotions are ambivalent: on one hand we lionize them and heavily depend on them, and on the other we deny, repress, and dismiss them. Emotions can be a source of guidance for well-being and a resource for nurturing the common good. They implicate our physical survival, our psychic health, the health of our relationships, the health of our organizational cultures and work environments, our political climates, and our socio-cultural realities. They provide critical information about what is working and what is not working in our lives, and they can either increase caring, empathy, awareness of justice, or inhibit it. Indeed, our emotions may be profound keys to the flourishing life. There are obstacles to their full contributions, however. Feeling them is one challenge; knowing what to do with them is a deeper, more complex one. Unfortunately, we don't often have the tools to distinguish when emotions are potentially life-giving, and when they are life-limiting. For these and other reasons we need to attend to them rather than avoid them and understand them in more nuanced ways rather than accept thin interpretations of them. This course takes up that challenge.

Class Procedures:

This course will consist of lectures, focused discussion, and student presentations. It will be dependent on your keeping up with the readings, and your willingness to come to class prepared to discuss them in a focused and in-depth way.

Requirements:

1. Attendance and informed participation in the class sessions
2. Weekly written assignments and in-class presentations
3. Final projects and papers, depending on your student status (see below)

Class Participation: 30% of final grade

Weekly summary papers: 30% of final grade

Class leadership as assigned 10% of final grade

+

For Master's Students Final Project: applications to ministry (17-20p sermon/ "lermon"):
30% of final grade

+

For Doctoral Students Final 17-20pp research paper: 30% of final grade

Texts:

Barbara McClure, *Emotions: Problems and Promise for Human Flourishing* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019). We will also be reading original works from early philosophers (Plato, Epicurus, etc.), early Christian theologians (Augustine, etc.), early natural scientists (Charles Darwin, William James, Paul MacLean, etc.), early psychologists (Sigmund Freud, Magda Arnold, etc.). These will be articles posted online, handouts, and e-books from TCU library.

Grading Procedures:

Grading assessments are made according to the official definition of letter grades in the Divinity School. Letter grades are defined numerically according to the following formula: A = 94-100 (A- =90-93), B+ = 87-89, B = 84-86, B- = 80-83, etc. The lowest passing grade for the course = 60 for masters students. It varies for doctoral students. Work not submitted will receive a "0". By BDS policy, incomplete grades are given only for genuine, unforeseeable emergencies such as accident or illness. They require application through the Registrar's office.