I. RATIONALE OF THE COURSE: The course will be devoted to close reading of works, written between the 1670s and the 1790s, by writers who struggled to understand the paradoxes of the self at a time when traditional religious and philosophical formulas were breaking down, and who explored fundamental questions that have remained important and troubling ever since. The philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of “the senses of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature which are at home in the modern West.” Yet these convictions coexist with a very different set of assumptions according to which the self is socially conditioned and enjoys neither individuality nor freedom except as consoling illusions. All modern thinkers about psychology and society have had to recognize the tension between these two modes of thinking. On the one hand, we share a strong intuition of human individuality and self-sufficiency; on the other hand, we share an equally strong intuition that the self is shaped by exterior forces. Modern theorists have much to tell us about this subject, but rather than permit the interpretation of texts to be controlled by recent theoretical paradigms, the course will go back behind them to consider the seedbed from which such theories originally grew. We continue to live within the conceptual framework that was developed during the Enlightenment, and a return to its origins, when ideas competed with ideas and had not yet hardened into systems, can be profoundly instructive. It is also instructive to look closely at the ways in which literary techniques, understood in the broadest sense, do more than merely communicate ideas: they embody and even create them, and it has become increasingly apparent that the experience of the self is best understood in narrative forms, whether presented as diaries, autobiographies, or novels.

II. WRITING REQUIREMENT:

The grade for undergraduate credit will be based on a midterm project (March 21) and final project (May 9), both of which will consist of essay questions, open-book and open-notes, and will be taken online (no proctor needed). Both of these assignments will be available during a 36-hour period during which we ask you to sit and write your responses, on your honor, for a 3-hour period of your choosing.

Alternatively, in place of the midterm project, you may, if you wish, submit a 5-6 page paper on a
specific topic, to be arranged in consultation with Kris Trujillo.

In addition to these two requirements (midterm project and final project, or 5-6 page paper plus final project) **graduate students will also write a 12-15 page term paper** (due on or before May 13).

**III. TEXTS:** please use these editions, which have been ordered at the Harvard Coop, so that we can refer easily in class to specific passages. ISBN numbers are included in case you want to order from amazon.com or some other source.

Boswell, *London Journal* (Yale 9780300093018)
Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist* (Penguin 9780140444728)
Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew and d’Alembert’s Dream* (Penguin 9780140441734)
Rousseau, *Confessions* (Oxford 9780199540037)
Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (Penguin 9780140444391)

In addition to the assigned texts, **SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS, HANDOUTS, and OUTLINES** will be provided for most lectures. These materials can be found under the appropriate week as listed on the course home page.

**Questions for discussion** are given with each assignment; these highlight some central issues in the texts, and they also indicate passages to read with particular attention. **To make it easy to locate these passages, you should use the assigned editions if at all possible.**

There are also two entirely voluntary **opportunities for discussion** (which don’t count toward the grade, since that would penalize people who prefer not to participate). These are:

A **weekly online live section**, which will be scheduled by our TA, Kris Trujillo, after finding out which day and time will best accommodate those who would like to participate;

and a **Discussion Forum** on the course website, where you may start a new thread each week or add your thoughts to an existing thread.
January

28 INTRODUCTORY CLASS [intro.x]
   Handout (on website): Introductory handout

February

1 Some seventeenth-century religious versions of the self [religion.x]
   website: bunyan.text, pascal.text, addison.text, quakers.text, descartes.text

Augustine on the divided self; externalization of unwanted aspects of the self in Bunyan’s allegory; Pascal’s silent universe and “hidden God;” the relation between radical individualism and programmatic doubt (as contrasted with older models of faith) in Descartes

For discussion: (1) Bunyan, pp. 2 and 5: why are interior, subjective states—the temptation to blasphemy and despair—represented as separate from the self? (2) pp. 6-7: why did it make the poor women joyful to describe their own righteousness as “filthy”? (3) Pascal, p. 2: why should we hate the self (in French, le moi or “the me”)? (4) In Addison’s adaptation of Psalm 19 (see the original on the next page), what gets left out? (5) Descartes, pp. 4 and 6: how does he rescue himself from the possibility that everything, even his own body, is an illusion, and that other human beings are only artificial robots?

8 Lafayette, The Princesse de Clèves [cleves.x]
   website: rochefoucauld.text
   Handouts (in class and on website): Cleves handout, Rochefoucauld handout

The pre-Enlightenment psychology of mondanité (worldliness) as viewed by La Rochefoucauld; love as an affliction and as a power struggle, seen from a woman’s point of view; the potentially destructive consequences of sincerity; problems of interpretation in a novel with a reticent narrator

For discussion: (1) pp. 147-48: why is it so gratifying to Nemours to spy on the Princesse? and how does it affect the story that it’s told by an omniscient narrator, rather than by one of the characters? (2) Why does the Princesse reject Nemours at the end? are there multiple reasons? (3) Is the psychology in the Maxims of La Rochefoucauld the same as that of this novel?
Empiricist philosophy and psychology [empiricism.x]

**website:** hobbes.text, locke.text, hume treatise.text, rasselas.text

The tension between the egotistical self and the social order in Hobbes; Locke’s theory of liberal individualism, based on the self as a *tabula rasa* that is gradually inscribed with data from outside, together with its political implications; in the philosophy of Hume, the self as a mere fiction, sustained only by instinct and social convention.

**For discussion:** (1) Hobbes, p. 3: what is the physiological basis of imagination, and why is it not to be trusted? (2) p. 6, are moral values merely relative? (3) Locke, p. 3: in what sense is someone asleep “not the same person” as when awake? (4) p. 5: why is judgment superior to wit and imagination? (5) pp. 6-7, how adequate is Locke’s account of mental illness? (6) p. 9, how is personal identity dependent on memory? (7) Hume, p. 2: why is our consciousness of ourselves always of “perpetual flux and movement”? (8) pp. 5-6, what protects us from the existential dread of Pascal and Descartes? (9) in My Own Life, what self-image does Hume seek to project? (10) In the brief excerpt from Johnson, how does imagination become a profound psychological threat?

Boswell, London Journal, in full if possible, but at least 39-161, 250-333 [boswell.x]

**website:** rambler 60.text

**Handouts** (in class and on website): Johnson’s Dictionary handout, Hebrides handout

The quest for self-knowledge, but also for pleasure and reputation, of a well-born young Scot whose main goal is to avoid going to law school; the increasing valuation of emotion (“sentiment”), and issues surrounding mental illness (“melancholy”).

**For discussion:** (1) p. 40: ponder the multiple functions that Boswell anticipates for his journal. (2) pp. 41-42: to what extent is Boswell’s farewell to his parents and to Edinburgh a sort of play-acting? (3) p. 54, what can “sincerity” mean when “sincere feelings of religion” coexist with plans for seduction? (4) p. 60: why does Boswell claim to have no money on him when he’s buying a very expensive sword? (It costs as much as the annual income of an ordinary laborer.) (5) p. 77: what insight is Boswell seeking to formulate when he says “I act passively”? (6) pp. 138-40: how much self-knowledge—or lack of it—does Boswell show in his account of the night at the inn with Louisa? (7) pp. 203-4: how does Boswell’s interior art gallery reflect the empiricist concept of the self? (8) pp. 263-64 and 272-73: what are some implications of these very different narratives of encounters with street prostitutes?
Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew* and *D’Alembert’s Dream*: at least 33-97, 149-233

**Handouts** (in class and on website): Acting handout, and *Candide* handout

The self divided between an idealistic “I” and a cynically role-playing “he;” speculations about human experience as reducible to material physicality

**For discussion:** (1) p. 33: picking up on the notion of a conversation with oneself, could we see the “he” and the “I” of the dialogue as two aspects of Diderot himself? (2) pp. 66-69: what are some implications of the debate on morality and social interaction? (3) pp. 61-62: what are “moral idioms”? (4) pp. 93-97 and 101: does Rameau’s aesthetic philosophy presume total separation between artistic excellence and ordinary morality? (5) pp. 173-75: how is the dreaming d’Alembert different from d’Alembert awake? and is his vision of the universe compatible with orthodox Christianity? (6) pp. 182-83: does the discussion of brain function anticipate modern neuroscience? (7) pp. 216-17: how does Dr. Bordeu challenge d’Alembert’s belief that his life is a series of conscious choices?

March

7  **Diderot, Jacques the Fatalist**, in full if possible, but at least 21-45, 67-76, 100-203, 245-254

**website:** [shandy.text](http://shandy.text)

The paradoxes of narrativity, self-presentation, and “truth” in a freewheeling anti-novel, with the implication that people are nothing more than the roles they play, and with a subtext of deterministic materialism.

**For discussion:** (1) p. 21: why does the narrative begin in this challenging way? (2) p. 22, plus p. 3 of the *Tristram Shandy* excerpts: how are conventional novelistic plots described? (3) p. 29: if everything that happens is written in the great scroll up above, are we utterly lacking in free will? and if so, is that alarming? (4) p. 30: why does Diderot cancel out the pursuing mob, and what is the significance of what he goes on to say about fictional truth? (5) p. 108: how does it affect the story of Madame de la Pommeraye to have it interrupted in this way? (6) pp. 116-18: what is implied in the “same” story happening to two different pairs of people? (7) pp. 147-151: how do the various characters interpret the ending of the Pommeraye story? does Diderot imply that there’s a correct way to interpret it? (8) pp. 200-201, plus p. 4 of the *Tristram Shandy* excerpts: how do Diderot and Sterne address double entendres, euphemisms, and sexual explicitness?
Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (67-137 only, excluding Rousseau’s notes) [discourse.x] website: social contract.text

Rousseau’s groundbreaking essays on anthropology and politics, placing the blame for mankind’s problems squarely on society, and proposing an ideal political system that might be able to legitimate the injustices that social life entails.

**For discussion:** (1) *Discourse on Inequality*, pp. 68 and 78: how can it make sense to understand present-day society by thinking about a state “which perhaps never existed,” and by “setting aside all the facts”? (2) pp. 147-48: in this footnote by Rousseau, is he taking a position similar to those of Hobbes and La Rochefoucauld? (3) pp. 100-101: in what sense is compassion for the suffering of others a natural instinct? (4) p. 109: does this account of private property imply the superiority of some form of communism? (5) pp. 114-16: how and why does the golden age of sociability go wrong? (6) *Social Contract* excerpts, p. 1: how can the chains of social inequality be made “legitimate”? (7) p. 10: he paradoxical statement that people must be “forced to be free” has been charged with leading to totalitarianism; how might Rousseau defend himself from that charge?

April

Rousseau, *Confessions*, Books 1-4 (pp. 5-171) [confessions.x] website: gibbon.text

A work of astounding originality, the model for most autobiographies ever since, emphasizing childhood experience and personal relationships, and seeking to explain personality through imaginative reconstruction of crucial formative episodes.

**For discussion:** (1) p. 5: How can Rousseau claim that his autobiography “has no model” when his very title is borrowed from Augustine? and why does he—unlike Augustine—assert that he expects God to forgive him, with this book as his self-justification? (2) pp. 14-17: in what way was the spanking by Mlle. Lambercier crucial in the formation of Rousseau’s personality? (3) pp. 25-26: how do Mlle. Vulson and young Goton represent two very different kinds of love? (4) p. 40: is this account of imagination as negative as it was in Hobbes and Locke? (5) pp. 73-75: why does Rousseau cherish the memory of this episode with Mme. Basile, during which nothing actually happened? (6) pp. 82-85: why
did Rousseau falsely accuse Marion, and how does he explain it? (7) pp. 93-94: what is the significance of the incident when Rousseau was able to interpret the Gouvon family motto? (8) pp. 144-46: how could Rousseau, the prophet of sincerity, have deluded himself into believing he was an accomplished musician? and why was he using an assumed name? (9) How does Gibbon’s self-presentation differ from Rousseau’s?

11 Rousseau, Confessions, Books 5-7 (pp. 172-338), and the following excerpts: beginning of Book 8 (340-49), middle section of Book 9 (404-439 – the wealthy Mme d’Épinay had provided a country retreat for Rousseau and Thérèse at the “Hermitage” near Paris), first page of Book 12 (p. 576 – Rousseau had to flee France when the religious views in his Émile aroused official outrage), final pages of Book 12 (621-630) [confessions.x2]

Handout (in class and on website): Reveries handout

For discussion: (1) pp. 105-6 and 190-92: since Rousseau was so desperately smitten with Mme. de Warens, why was he filled with dread when she seduced him? (2) pp. 200-201: does Rousseau’s account of his relationship with Claude Anet, and his behavior when Anet was dying, ring true? (3) pp. 220 and 630: in the descriptions of Les Charmettes and the Ile de Saint-Pierre, what quality of happiness is Rousseau seeking to recreate? (4) pp. 245-48: why did the encounter with Mme. de Larnage allow Rousseau to be truly himself and to experience complete gratification, when he was posing at the time as an Englishman named Dudding? (5) pp. 311-13: why does Rousseau say that the humiliating encounter with Zulietta “portrays my nature in its true colors” and is essential for the reader’s understanding? (6) pp. 322 and 344-45: what is different, and evidently more satisfactory, in Rousseau’s relationship with Thérèse? (7) p. 342: why does the decision to enter the essay competition arouse such strong emotions, and in what way does Rousseau “become another man”? (8) pp. 416-17: what is the connection between writing a romantic novel and falling in love with Mme. d”Houdetot?

18 Franklin, Smith, and Casanova

website: franklin.text, smith.text, casanova.text

Three Enlightenment styles: Ben Franklin the archetypal self-made American, whose engaging account of self-invention resolutely ignores inner complexities; Adam Smith’s theory of competitive individualism, with implications for both self-awareness and social interaction; and the highly readable memoir of a Venetian adventurer who lived by his wits, embodying the Enlightenment ideal of doing what comes naturally. [franklin.x]
(1) **Franklin**, pp. 2-3: how does Franklin’s account of a boyhood misdeed contrast with Rousseau’s account of stealing from his master Ducommun? (p. 4) how does Franklin respond to Puritanical books by Bunyan and Cotton Mather? (2) pp. 8-9: why is his treatment of Deborah Read an “erratum,” and how does he correct it? (3) pp. 10-13 and 24-26: with the Poor Richard sayings in mind, ponder the differences between Franklin’s and Rousseau’s understanding of the self, and of how to conduct one’s life. (4) p. 27: how is chess a better model for Franklin’s philosophy of life than a card game would be? (5) **Smith**, p. 5: why does he recommend dividing oneself in two, so as to view one’s own behavior from an impersonal standpoint? (6) p. 10, how is self-interest central to Smith’s understanding of social and economic life? (7) **Casanova**, pp. 5-6: what is the significance of the mysterious cure by the sorceress? (8) why is explaining the Latin riddle an early sign of Casanova’s fundamental nature? (9) pp. 24-38: why does he place such emphasis on the strange relationship with “Bellino”? (10) pp. 41-44: in interpreting “cabbalistic science” for Signor Bragadin, is Casanova simply acting as a clever con man? and if so, how does he justify it? (11) pp. 55-60: why does he cheerfully accept the arrangement by which the lover of M—M— (who is herself a nun) watches them voyeuristically through a secret spy-hole? (12) pp. 79-90: how does the celebrated account of Casanova’s escape from prison in the Ducal Palace exemplify his qualities of character?


**Handout**: Laclos and Blake

An epistolary novel of seduction, love, and betrayal that becomes an abyss of misdirection and deception, exposing the moral bankruptcy of a cynical social world that seems able to defeat any possible alternative. 

**For discussion**: (1) pp. 30-32 and 37: why does Merteuil feel that her treatment of the Chevalier shows her total mastery, and why does Valmont argue that she’s mistaken? (2) pp. 103-105: what do Valmont’s cunning double entendres reveal about the untrustworthiness of language? (3) p. 132: how is Merteuil “like the Deity” in her treatment of Mme. de Volanges and Cécile? (4) pp. 177-87: how does Letter 81 (at the center of the novel) express Merteuil’s personal manifesto, and what does it mean to say je suis mon ouvrage, “I am what I have created” (p. 181)? is this different from the self-fashioning of Franklin or Casanova? (5) pp. 223-24: does Valmont’s account of enjoying tragedies on stage resonate with Rameau’s philosophy of art? (6) pp. 305-6 and 312: why does Tourvel finally give herself to Valmont? how does he react to what happened? and why does Laclos make Valmont, not Tourvel, describe it? (7) p. 369: why does Merteuil proclaim: “Very well, then. War!”
May

2 **Blake**, excerpts from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* [blake.x] – and, if you have time, look at some of the original “illuminated” versions, combining images with texts, at the Blake Archive, [http://www.blakearchive.org/](http://www.blakearchive.org/)

**website:** blake1.text, blake2.text, hume religion.text

A profound attempt to rethink the dilemmas of psychology and society in a symbolic multi-media mode that challenges readers/viewers to a new kind of imaginative insight.

**For discussion:** (1) **Blake1**, p. 3: is there an implicit criticism of orthodox religion in *The Chimney Sweeper*? (2) p. 5: is the psychological pattern in *The Clod & the Pebble* applicable to *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*? (3) pp. 6 and 10: what conception of sexuality is symbolically presented in *The Sick Rose* and *I saw a chapel all of gold*? (4) p. 9: how is *Mock on* a critique of the Enlightenment? (5) **Blake2**, p. 1: what is the relationship between *The Tyger* and *The Lamb* (p. 2 of the first set of poems)? (6) p. 2: in *London*, what indictment of society is encapsulated in the references to chimney sweepers, soldiers, and prostitutes? (7) p. 6-7: how do the Proverbs of Hell differ from the proverbs presented by Franklin in his persona as Poor Richard? how do they differ from the *Maxims* of La Rochefocauld?

9 **FINAL PROJECT** [taken online, during a time frame to be announced]

13 **GRADUATE TERM PAPER DUE**