

SYLLABUS
PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE 253 - 002
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
SPRING 2012
MWF 1.30 – 2.20 PM LECTURE HALL # 2

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Office hours: by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This class will examine the relationship between literature/poetry and philosophy, in particular – the influence of the philosophical ideas and philosophical schools on literature. We will also discuss and analyze the literary (fiction, essay, play, poetry) and philosophical works (treatise, dialogue, essay) in their historical context. The readings and discussions will include the ideas of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles, St. Augustine, Pascal, Descartes, Voltaire, Emerson, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, Sartre, Camus, Milosz and others. This course will combine the elements of lecture, class discussions, close reading and analysis of the text and students' oral presentations.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Plato: *The Republic* (any edition with Stephanus pagination)
2. Aristotle: *Poetics*
3. Sophocles: *Oedipus*
4. Sophocles: *Antigone*
5. Voltaire: *Candide*
6. Milosz: *The Captive Mind*
7. B. Magee: *The Story of Philosophy*

OPTIONAL TEXTS:

1. A Dictionary of Philosophy (any)

GENERAL EDUCATIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

The students will be able to:

- Read for comprehension, detail and nuance
- Identify the specific literary qualities of language as employed in the texts they read
- Analyze the ways specific literary devices contribute to the meaning of the text
- Identify and evaluate the contribution of the social, political, historical and cultural context in which a literary text is produced
- Evaluate a critical argument in others' writings as well as one's own

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Students will be expected to read and make an effort to comprehend all assignments. We will be reading and interpreting the original philosophical/literary texts. Please be warned that the reading assignments, particularly of the philosophical texts, will often have to be read several times to be fully comprehended.

There will be three in class tests/exams – each worth 20 points. These tests will be a combination of short answers based on our readings, class lectures and on understanding of various philosophers along with understanding philosophical/literary terms and genres. Please, bring a Blue *Book* for these tests.

Each student (assigned in groups of three or four) will choose one topic from a list provided for a class presentation (along with a 1 page long report/summary). This assignment is worth 20 points and will take place in the second half of the semester. The format, specific topics and the dates of the presentations will be discussed in class .Examples of topics for presentations: Greek Mythology in Homer’s works, Renaissance literature, philosophy and art, Importance of Liberal education, Enlightenment idea of progress in literature and in philosophy, Romantic literature and poetry, Utopian ideas in literature and in philosophy, Existentialism. You may organize your project as a power point presentation, use handouts, show fragments from films, read and comment on a poem or other format as you feel best depicts your topic.

Regular attendance is strongly encouraged. Excessive absences will influence your grade in a negative way. I will check attendance many times per semester. I will randomly select, however, only ten attendance lists and you will get one point for each time your name appears on the list (up to ten points). Please, be on time and do not leave class earlier. The remaining five points will be distributed between short take home (up to one page long) projects or in-class quizzes.

Regardless of the reason of the absence, students are still responsible for submitting any work due on that day. If you miss a class, please arrange with your colleagues for topics and information missed during your absence.

FINAL GRADES:

91 – 100	A
81 - 90	B
71 - 80	C
61 - 70	D
Less than 61	F

Exams/Tests:	3 x 20 = 60 points
Presentation:	20 points
Attendance, quizzes:	20 points

	100 Points Total

COLLEGE POLICIES (and mine):

Smoking, food, and drinks are not permitted in the classroom.

GMU complies with the American with Disabilities Act. If any student needs special accommodations, please speak to me or the campus ADA representative in the Counseling Office.

While in this course, students are expected to display behavior consistent with professional etiquette and accepted common practices of courtesy and respect. Disruption and rudeness will not be tolerated. Please turn off your cellular phones, I-Pods and other electronic devices.

Plagiarism: All exams must follow the guidelines of the GMU Honor Code. I understand plagiarism as the use of a meaningful ideas/quotations from someone else's work without adequate acknowledgement.

Changes in Syllabus and class cancellation: The time table and the list of the topics for each class are tentative. The amount of time we will spend on each topic may vary. Please, be aware that, depending on your questions and our discussions, we will address many philosophical issues not listed in the syllabus or discussed in your books. Therefore, please, never ask questions " Why are we discussing this material?" or "Is this going to be on the test?"

If I have to cancel class, I will notify you. If I am late (traffic), please, wait 15 minutes. If you are absent, please, find out what you missed.

When you contact me through email, please do not write: " Hi, I missed last class. Can you tell me what we covered?" Instead, please, find out what you missed from your classmate, from the syllabus or from me. In your email, please, always identify yourself by full name, course and the day/time of class. I teach many classes in many places and am not clairvoyant to guess your name.

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

This is an approximate time frame. The amount of time we will spend on each topic may vary. In addition to listed readings, occasionally, I will ask you to read more from other sources.

Segment I

Jan 23 – Jan 27: Introduction. Philosophy. Empirical sciences. Literature

Jan 30 – Feb 3 : Branches of Philosophy. Philosophical vocabulary

Feb 6 – Feb 10: Importance of liberal arts. Aesthetics – short history. A few literary terms. Read: Magee: 1-23 (Greeks), 44-47 (Epicureanism, Stoicism), 172-179 (Nietzsche),

Feb 13 – Feb 17: Socrates trial. Plato's *Apology*. Plato: *The Republic* (Role of poetry in the society
Censorship. Allegory of the Cave, Gyges Ring (interpretations).
Cognitive character of poetry/literature?)
Read: selections from *The Republic* : 327-420, 434 – 440, 514-523, 555-561,
595-620, Magee: 24-31 (Plato). Overview for the test

Feb 20 (Monday): EXAM # 1

Segment II

Feb 22 – Feb 24: Intro to Aristotle. Aesthetics. Literary criticism Read: Magee: 32-39,

Feb 27 – Mar 2: Aristotle. Read : *Poetics*

Mar 5 – Mar 9: Greek tragedy. Read: *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*

Mar 12 – Mar 18: Spring break

Mar 19: Overview for exam # 2

Mar 21 (Wedn) : EXAM # 2

Segment III

Mar 23: Intro to PRESENTATIONS

Mar 26 and 28: Antiquity. Read: Magee: 1-47

Mar 30 and Apr 2: Medieval philosophy and literature

Apr 4 and 6: Renaissance

Apr 9 and 11: Enlightenment

Apr 13 and 16: Romanticism

Apr 18 and 20: Utopia in philosophy and literature

Apr 23 and 25: Existentialism

Apr 27 and 30: Socialistic realism

May 2 and 4: Milosz and Polish literature

EXAM # 3 (Final): Wednesday, May 9, 1.30 – 4.15 PM

Last day to drop with no tuition penalty: Jan. 31

Last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty: Feb. 14

Last day to drop with 67 % tuition penalty: Feb. 24