PHIL 115: PHILOSOPHY IN LITERATURE
Fall 2007
MW 1:30-2:45   MND-3009
General Education Area C4
Writing Intensive
WebCT-Assisted

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PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT   MND-3030   278-6424

OFFICE HOURS: M 3:00-4:00; W 4:30-5:30; By Appointment

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:
Philosophy in Literature. Study of selected works of fiction which focus on
philosophically controversial questions, e.g., basic moral dilemmas, the meaning of life,
alienation, nihilism, the existence of God. **Prerequisite:** Passing score on the WPE. 3
units.

OBJECTIVES:
At the end of the course students should:
1. Have an improved understanding of different forms of literature, including novels,
   plays, and opera.
2. Recognize particular philosophical questions, or answers to philosophical questions,
   as they are embodied in literary characters.
3. Distinguish between what is overtly represented in a literary work and beliefs,
   assumptions, attitudes, etc., which the work *presents* to the audience.
4. State clearly the philosophical arguments which a given work of literature assumes, as
   well as those it presents.
5. Examine such philosophical content in a critical way to determine their soundness.
6. Improve their capacity to write organized, cogent, and well-argued argumentative
   papers on topics in philosophy in literature.

BOOKS:
   Sophocles. *Philoctetes.*
   Christopher Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus.*
   Johann von Goethe. *Faust.* (Selections)
   Tirso de Molina. *The Playboy of Seville.*
   Lorenzo da Ponte. *The Punished Libertine* (libretto of Mozart’s
   opera *Don Giovanni*)
TOPICS:
This course will investigate one way in which literature can have philosophical content: by embodying philosophical claims in literary characters. We will investigate examples involving literary characters who, for one reason or another, have achieved mythical status. Such characters may pose philosophical problems or represent solutions to philosophical problems which the culture that produced the myths found to be especially pressing. When their problems changed the characters changed as well, sometimes in revealing ways.

We will investigate what philosophical problems and claims are embodied in a selection of mythical characters from antiquity, the early modern period, and the nineteenth century. We will conclude with some arguments about present myths and their content.

REQUIREMENTS:
Two exams at scheduled times: midterm (15%); final (15%)
Four papers: Papers 1 & 2 on assigned topics (4 pages: 15% each); Paper 3 (7-10 pages: 15%); Paper 4 (7-10 pages: 15%).
Quizzes and Class Participation (10%)

POLICIES:
WebCT
The class will use some elements of WebCT.
WebCT is a program designed for on-line college courses. Among other things, it serves as a location for course material, lecture notes, papers, and discussions. I will make important course content available, including lecture notes and other supplementary material.
You will take the reading quizzes and exams on WebCT and submit papers through it.
The WebCT site is available at https://online.csus.edu.

Exams
We will review the material for each exam briefly during the class preceding, explaining what concepts and abilities the exam will test for. I welcome questions, even at times outside that review period.
I will open the ‘window’ for each exam for two days. You may take the exam at any time during the open-window period. You will have 75 minutes for the first exam, two hours for the second.
Warning: WebCT sometimes shuts down for maintenance late at night, so check the announcements at the main WebCT page to make sure you have enough time to finish.

To take an exam in WebCT:
- Enter WebCT at https://online.csus.edu;
- Open the main page for PHIL 115;
- Open “Assessments” (under “Course Tools” on the left margin of the main page);
- Answer the questions within the space provided (make sure you submit each question and the entire exam).
You will have only one chance to take the exam, so check your answers before submitting.

There will be no makeup exams.

**Reading Quizzes**
There will be a reading quiz on almost every reading assignment; sometimes more than one. A reading quiz will consist of five to ten questions designed so that a careful reader should be able to answer them. The quiz will be due by the opening of the class period in which the reading will be discussed.
To take a reading quiz, follow the instructions for taking an exam above.

**Papers**
Follow the instructions for argumentative papers found in the “Guidelines for Writing Philosophy Papers” at the Philosophy Department website.
Go to the Department’s main page (http://www.csus.edu/phil), click on “Dept. Program and Requirements,” then click on “Guidelines…”
Or go directly to: http://www.csus.edu/phil/req/writing.htm
Papers will be graded according to the “Grading Guidelines for Philosophy Papers”: http://www.csus.edu/phil/req/grading.htm

To submit a paper in WebCT:
- Enter WebCT at https://online.csus.edu;
- Open the main page for PHIL 115;
- Open “Assignments” (under “Course Tools” on the left margin of the main page);
- Open the correct assignment; you will see there the text of the assignment itself, as well as the due date and time.
- You will see a space for the paper – don’t use it;
- Instead, click on the “Attachment” button;
- Attach your paper as an editable file, something that will open in Microsoft Word (not a .pdf or .htm file); if you’re unsure, attach it as a ‘rich text’ file (.rtf).

Save a copy of earlier drafts and notes for your papers. If I suspect plagiarism, the burden of proof will be on you. You will have to show me that you didn’t plagiarize. You can do that by showing me the work you did preparing the paper: notes, early drafts, etc. Keep what you need to show me that it is your work.

**Class Meetings**
I expect attendance at every class meeting. If for some excellent reason you cannot make class, let me know – preferably in advance. If this is impossible let me know by 5:00 on the day you miss. I will lower you a grade increment for every unexcused absence.

Class meetings will begin at 1:30 with a calling of the roll. Be on time. Anticipate. Excuses don’t cut it: I will treat a pattern of late arrival as an unexcused absence.

I expect silent attention during class periods. If there is a class discussion I will serve as moderator; please wait to be recognized before making a contribution.
If you wish to ask a question, answer a question, or make a contribution to the class, please ask to be recognized. There is no excuse for conducting a private discussion during class time. I will treat a pattern of talking in class as an unexcused absence.

**Reading Assignments**
You will be responsible for the entirety of all readings assigned. However, at times I will indicate in the syllabus below that I will pay particular attention to some part of a reading. As a result, it may happen that other parts of the reading will not be treated in class. You will be responsible for them anyway. If you don’t understand something, ask a question. Remember, students’ questions help me too.

**Grades**
Conversion Between Letter and Numerical Grades

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- Exams will receive a numerical score;
- Papers will be assigned a letter grade by the criteria in the “Grading Guidelines”;
- Reading quizzes will receive a grade of **2** (full credit), **1** (inadequate reading), or **0** (not taken); an average of **1.7** will constitute full credit for the reading quiz component of the final grade (10%). So it’s very much in your interest to take them conscientiously.

The course grade will be determined thus:
- Exams will receive their numerical score;
- The letter grade for papers will be converted to the highest number within the grade range (so a **B+** paper, say, will be assigned **91**);
- A reading quiz score of **1.7** or above will receive a score of **100**. Lower scores will be prorated.

The course grade will be determined by the weighted sum of the exams, quizzes, and papers.

**SYLLABUS**

Week 1  9/5  Introduction
- The nature of philosophical problems
- Characters as embodiments of problems and solutions
- The function of myths
I. Classical Antiquity: Odysseus
Whoever approaches the Olympian gods with another religion in mind, searching among them for moral elevation, even for sanctity, for disincarnate spirituality, for charity and benevolence, will soon be forced to turn his back on them, discouraged and disappointed.
Nietzsche

Week 2  9/10  Who Put the ‘Diss’ in ’Odysseus’?
[Odyssey, Bks. 5-10]

9/12 Odysseus as Trickster
[Odyssey, Bks. 11-17]

Week 3  9/17  The Cosmic Order and the Moral Order
[Odyssey, Bks. 18-24]

9/19 The Career of Odysseus after Homer
[Philoctetes]

Week 4  9/24  Philosophy and the Deus ex Machina
[Philoctetes]

II. The Early Modern Period: Faust, Don Juan, Don Quixote

Faust
I pray to God that he may relieve me of God.
Meister Eckhart

9/26  The Nutty Professor
[The Faustbuch]

Paper #1 due: Wednesday, September 26, 1:30 p.m.

Week 5  10/1  Forbidden Knowledge
[The Faustbuch]

10/3 “...(A) Mortal God”
[Doctor Faustus]

Week 6  10/8  “Lente, lente currite noctis equi”
[Doctor Faustus]

10/10 Romantic Epistemology
[Faust, Part I]

Week 7  10/15 “Make good use of your time! It hurries past….”
Don Juan

Grief for the discovery of some defect of ability is SHAME, or the passion that discovers itself in BLUSHING, and consists in the apprehension of something dishonorable; and in young men is a sign of the love of good reputation and commendable; in old men it is a sign of the same, but, because it comes too late, not commendable. The contempt of good reputation is called IMPUDENCE.

Thomas Hobbes

Week 8 10/22 The Chivalric Code
[Lecture]

The midterm exam window will open on Monday, October 22 at 3:00 pm, and remain open until Wednesday, October 24, 1:30 pm. The exam must be taken during that time.

10/24 The Dilemma of Chivalric Virtue
[The Playboy of Seville]

Week 9 10/29 “God exacts full payment/In His own due time”
[The Playboy of Seville]

10/31 Music and Meaning
[Lecture]

Paper #2 due: Wednesday, October 31, 1:30 pm.

Week 10 11/5 "But in Spain, A Thousand and Three"
[Viewing of Don Giovanni, Act I, Scenes 1-3]
11/7 The Net Closes Around the Don
[Viewing of Don Giovanni, Act I, Scene 4 – Act II, Scene 2]

Week 11 11/12 The Guest of Stone
[Viewing of Don Giovanni, Act II, Scenes 3-5]

III. The Nineteenth Century: Brunnhilde, Siegfried

11/14 The Nietzschean Turn
[On the Geneology of Morals, First Essay]
Brunnhilde

Nature is a pander, Time a wrecker, and Death a murderer. I have always preferred to stand up to these facts, and build institutions on their recognition. You prefer to propitiate the three devils by proclaiming their chastities, their thrift, and their loving kindness; and to base your institutions on these flatteries. Is it any wonder that the institutions do not work smoothly?

George Bernard Shaw

Week 12 11/19 The Ring
[Reingold, Scenes 1 and 2]

11/21 The Spear
[Reingold, Scenes 3 – 4]

Week 13 11/26 The Sword
[Walkure, Act I]

Paper #3 due: Monday, November 26, 1:30 pm.

11/28 The Sword Shattered
[Walkure, Acts II, III]

Siegfried

And it is the great noontide, when man in the middle of his course between animal and Superman celebrateth his advance to the evening as his highest hope, for it is the advance to a new morning.

Nietzsche

Week 14 12/3 A New Hope
[Siegfried, Act I-II]

12/5 The Sword Reforged
[Siegfried, Acts II-III]

Week 15

12/10 A Hero’s Journey
[Gotterdammerung, Act I-II]

12/12 The New Morning of the World
[Gotterdammerung, Act III]

Paper #4 due: Friday, December 14, 5:00 pm.
The final exam window will be open from Monday, December 17, 12:00 noon until Wednesday, December 19, 12:00 noon.

Paper Topics

1. Due Wednesday, September 26, 1:30 pm
A Passage from *Don Quixote*, Part I, Chapters V and VI:
(Don Quixote’s relatives and friends, worried about his delusions of knighthood, decide upon a cure.)

The house keeper said, “Woe is me? I’m...as sure as death that those accursed books of chivalry that he continually reads have turned his brain topsy-turvy...The Devil and Barabbas take such books, for they have ruined the finest mind in all La Mancha!” The niece said the same and a little more: “You must know, Master Nicholas, that it was a frequent occurrence for my uncle to read those soulless books of misadventures for days and nights on end. At the end of that time he would cast the book from his hands, clutch his sword, and begin to slash the walls. You might have cured him* before things reached such a state, and you would have burned all those excommunicated books (he has many, mind you), for they all deserve to be burned as heretics.”

“I agree with that,” said the curate, “and I hold that tomorrow must not pass without a public inquiry being made into them. They should be condemned to the fire to prevent them from tempting those who read them.”

The curate asked the niece for the keys of the room where the books, the authors of the mischief, were kept, and she gave them to him willingly. The first that master Nicholas the barber handed to him was *Amadis of Gaul* in four parts. “There is,” said the curate,” some mystery about this, for I have heard it said that this was the first book of chivalry printed in Spain and that all the rest owe their origin to it. I am therefore of the opinion that we ought to condemn it to the fire without mercy because it was the lawgiver of so sinister a sect.”

“No, your reverence,” said the barber, “for I have heard that it is the best of all the books of its kind. Since it is unrivaled in its style, it ought to be pardoned.” “That is true,” replied the curate, “and for that reason we may grant it life for the present.

“What great bulky thing is that?” asked the curate.

“This,” replied the barber, “is *Don Olivante de Laura*.”

“The author of that,” said the curate, “is the same man who wrote *The Garden of Flowers*, and to tell you the truth I cannot decide which of the two books is the more truthful, or rather the less untruthful. All I can say is that he must go into the yard for a braggart and a nincompoop.”

“The next one is *Florismarte of Hyrcania*,” said the barber.

“Is Sir Florismarte here?” asked the curate. “By my troth, then he must come to a swift end in the yard, in spite of his strange birth and fantastic
adventures, for his dry and unsympathetic style deserves no other fate. To the yard with him.”
("In the 17th century barbers performed minor surgery and other medical procedures.

Assignment
The author Cervantes is having a bit of fun in this passage, giving his own reviews of books of chivalric romance (which were, along with pastoral poems, the bestsellers of his day).

Update the passage.

What is your favorite candidate for a work of literature, or a type of literature, that should be suppressed?

Some candidates (You definitely need not choose from this list):
- Science fiction
- Pornography
- New Age self-help manuals
- “American Idol”
- All episodes of Star Trek: The Next Generation
- Steven King ick-fests
- BBC dramatizations of those British novels that bored us stupid in high school
- High-toned Merchant/Ivory snoozathons like Remains of the Day
- Bodice ripper romances
- Gangsta rap
- The plays of Harold Pinter
- Anime
- Zombie movies
- Biographies of 16-year old gymnasts
- Memoirs by World Wrestling Federation Superstars
- Vintage Japanese monster movies (except Rodan, which was cool)
- The last thirty years of Peanuts
- Anything written by a self-described “activist”
- Anything that has the faintest chance of being chosen for Oprah’s Book Club
- Adam Sandler movies (Adam Sandler himself to be burnt at the stake)
- The entire oeuvre of Quentin Tarantino
- Instruction manuals for idiots
- Torture psycho movies (Saw, and the like)

Let your imagination out for a trot.

Give your reasons for destroying the stuff. (Not that we really would burn it…)
Give your reason for any exceptions.

Tips on Writing Paper #1
1. I don’t want a diatribe; don’t just abuse the literature.
   I want an argument that the literature constitutes some kind of wrong, or harm, or offense from which society, or certain segments of society, should be protected.
2. But don’t argue potential harm to children from reading it. Lots of worthy literature is unsuitable for children. Argue that the literature should be kept from competent adults.
Alternatively, you could argue for saving the literature from those who want to burn it. In that case, give positive reasons for the value of the literature; don’t just appeal to general arguments against censorship.

2. Due Wednesday, October 31, 1:30 pm.
Employing the distinction between what is represented in a work of literature and what is presented, write an essay about a work where that distinction is especially conspicuous.
What is represented?
What is presented?
Do you think the author is conscious of the gap?
Does the author use the distinction to make a point? If so, what is the point?
How is the difference shown in the work?
How does the difference function to produce the effect it produces?
How does the gap affect the worth of the work?

Some illustrative examples where the representation/presentation gap appears:
   Goethe’s Faust (obviously!)
   A Clockwork Orange
   The Godfather

3. Due Monday, November 26, 1:30 pm
Take a work of literature (broadly construed) that, you believe, has philosophical content – either poses a philosophical question or proposes an answer.
State the philosophical question (or answer).
Show how the work presents its philosophical content.
Provide a critical consideration of the work, both of its philosophy and of how well the work presents its philosophical content.
Consult with me first.

4. Due Friday, December 14, 5:00 pm.
Revise Paper #3 in light of my comments on it, and your reconsideration of it. Produce a better organized, more cogent, better-argued version of the paper.