

Philosophy & Drama

Skidmore College
Spring 2013
PH 230-001
W/F 10:10-11:30 am
Tisch 205

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Office hours: TU 2:00-3:30pm
W 2:30-4:00pm
& by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores two main issues. The first is the relationship between philosophy and literature, with emphasis on the dramatic arts. In the *Republic* Plato speaks of the “ancient quarrel” between poetry and philosophy, and the dramatic poets figure prominently in that discussion. What is the quarrel about? How do philosophers and poets represent the world and human life? Does drama present any sort of fundamental challenge to philosophy, or certain modes of doing philosophy? Is it possible to understand the relation between literary works and philosophy in terms of cooperation?

The second theme of the course is the nature of dramas. We will consider a number of philosophical theories of, or complaints about, tragedy and comedy, as well as the dramas that inspired those reflections. What is the nature of the tragic? Is the tragic only a literary genre or also a recognizable “phenomenon of life?” What is the nature of comedy? What is its function in society? Is it possible to give an account of the phenomenon of laughter?

REQUIRED TEXTS AND VIDEOS

- Plato, *Republic* (Hackett)
- *Sophocles I (Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone)*, 2nd ed., D. Greene & R. Lattimore (eds.), D. Greene (trans.) (University of Chicago Press)
- Aristophanes, *Lysistrata and Other plays*, revised ed., trans. A. H. Sommerstein (Penguin Classics)
- Molière, *Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, trans. R. Wilbur (Harvest Books, 1965)
- F.W. Murnau, *Tartuffe* (2003), (reserve)
- Billy Wilder, *Some Like It Hot* (1959), (reserve)

Additional readings will be made available on the course website, which you can access at:
<http://blackboard.skidmore.edu>

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course combines close readings of texts with classroom discussion and written assignments. These three components are designed to introduce you to the practice of philosophy, and its approach to literature, through the active appropriation of some fundamental ideas and issues. Specifically, we will learn how to:

- Read a philosophical text. This requires the ability to identify a writer’s premises and conclusions and to assess and critique his or her mode of argumentation.

- Write a philosophical essay. You will be able to formulate a clear thesis, support it with clear arguments, and assess and respond to objections raised against it.
- Engage in philosophical discussion. In class you will present philosophical views and interpretations and articulate the reasons for thinking those views are true; you will respond to objections that others raise for your views, and formulate questions for others so as to develop and strengthen their position.

COURSE POLICIES

Please leave, cell phones and other electronic devices turned off (there may be exceptions for students with documented disabilities).

Please ALWAYS bring the text(s) we are discussing to class; we will read passages from them.

I will probably communicate with you via e-mail throughout the course. Please check your Skidmore e-mail account regularly.

Please feel free to come to my office hours with any question you may have about the course, the material we are discussing or any other issue. If you cannot make it to regular office hours, please feel free to make an appointment with me.

Attendance:

You are expected to arrive to class on time. Attendance is mandatory. More than two unexcused absences will have a depressing effect on your *final* grade.

Academic Integrity:

All of your work for this course is subject to the College Honor Code. Two main things must be noted for this class:

- a. Papers: any source that you use in your papers, including internet sources, *must* be quoted and cited. Failing to do so constitutes plagiarism. If you are not sure about what plagiarism is or have questions about a specific case, please consult me or a librarian. *When in doubt, cite.*
- b. Exams: you may study together to prepare for exams (in fact it can be very fruitful) but you *may not* make use of any notes or help from others (in any form) during exams.

Accommodations:

If you have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact me during office hours to discuss your specific needs.

Assignments:

No late assignment will be accepted without express permission of the instructor obtained at least 24 hours before the assignment's due date.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Participation (20% of the final grade):

- ❖ Open class discussion: this is a discussion-based course, therefore your regular participation is essential. You must read the texts carefully, often more than once, and be prepared to

discuss the readings in class and share your insights. After class, I will record next to your name a number between 0 and 2 corresponding to your participation for that day.

- ❖ At the beginning of each class, a student will briefly summarize and present the main ideas discussed in our previous meeting, and pose one question related to them that engages the class in a meaningful discussion.

Short written assignments (15% of the final grade):

At least once a week (and maybe more) you will write reading reports (format and content will be explained in class).

In class I may randomly select students to present their responses. Your classmates and I will respond to your presentation and this will lead us to the discussion of the reading themselves.

At times one-page essays may replace the reading reports.

Two exams (the first will count for 20% of the final grade, the second for 15 %)

Two papers (15% each)

There is no final exam for this course.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

The schedule is subject to change based on class needs and interests. Additional readings may be added at the discretion of the instructor. Precise reading assignments for each meeting will be provided in class.

Note: RR = Reading report due

Week 1

Jan. 23: Introduction to the course

Jan. 25: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (Blackboard)

Week 2

Jan. 30: Scheler, "On the Tragic" (Blackboard)

Feb. 1: Plato, *Republic* selections from Books 2 and 3

Week 3

Feb. 6: Plato, *Republic* Book 10

Feb. 8: Plato,

Week 4

Feb. 13: Aristotle selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*; *Poetics* Ch. 1-4 (Blackboard)

Feb. 15: Aristotle, *Poetics* Ch. 6-12 and 15-16

Week 5

Feb. 20: Aristotle, *Poetics* Ch. 13, selections from *Rhetoric* (Blackboard)

Feb. 22: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*

Week 6

Feb. 27: Hegel, selections from *Lectures on Aesthetics* (Blackboard)

••• First take-home exam due •••

March 1: Hegel, selections from *Lectures on Aesthetics*

Week 7

March 6: Hegel, selections from *Lectures on Aesthetics*

How to write a philosophy paper.

March 8: Sophocles, *Antigone*

Week 8

March 9-17: Spring Break

Week 9

March 20: Aristophanes, *Clouds*; Aristotle, *Poetics* Ch. 5

March 22: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*

••• First paper due •••

Week 10

March 27: Strauss, selections from *Socrates and Aristophanes*

March 29: Molière, *Tartuffe*

Week 11

April 3: Molière, *The Misanthrope*

April 5: Rousseau, *Letter to D'Alembert* (Blackboard)

Week 12

April 10: George Meredith, *An Essay on Comedy* (Blackboard)

April 12: George Meredith, *An Essay on Comedy*

Week 13

April 17: Billy Wilder, *Some Like It Hot*; Bergson, *Laughter* (Blackboard)

••• Second take-home exam due •••

April 19: Bergson, *Laughter*

Week 14

April 24: Philosophy and Comedy, article TBA

April 26: Final discussion

Last day of classes

Week 15

•••Final paper due •••Date to be announced