

PHIL 253-005/006
Instructor: Dr. Kurt Brandhorst

Office: Robinson B 458

Office Hours: Mon: 3:00-4:00 and
Tues: 1:30-2:30
or by appointment

Email: kbrandho@gmu.edu

Where to find information about this course: all course information including the syllabus, assignments, and any additional announcements or changes to the schedule will be posted on the Blackboard site for this course.

You should also check your GMU email regularly for class announcements.

Department webpage: <http://philosophy.gmu.edu/>

Guide for Writing in Philosophy: <http://philosophy.gmu.edu/undergraduate/writing-standards>

COURSE SYLLABUS

In this course we will examine the idea of tragedy as both a literary and philosophical form. We begin with a close reading of some examples of Attic Tragedy: *Oedipus the King & Antigone* by Sophocles and *The Eumenides* by Aeschylus. We then move on to critical and theoretical assessment of tragedy. Aristotle provides contemporary commentary on Greek Tragedy as an art form and insists that tragic drama serves an important ethical, political and philosophical purpose. Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* offers a modern interpretation of the role and purpose of Greek Tragedy while Kierkegaard presents an account of Ancient Tragedy as a literary form that Modernity cannot readily replicate. Taking up Kierkegaard's challenge we will examine Camus' idea of the Absurd as a modern cousin of the Tragic and Kafka's *Trial* as a 20th Century extension of the idea of tragedy. We close the course with Fanon's account of race and by applying the ideas we have examined throughout the course to a close reading of Wright's *Native Son*.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READING

There are THREE texts you are expected to acquire for the course.

Sophocles, *Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, R. Fagles (trans), Penguin, 2012

ISBN-13: 978-0140444254

ISBN-10: 0140444254

Kafka, Franz, *The Trial*, B. Mitchell (trans), Schocken, 1999

ISBN-13: 978-0805209990

ISBN-10: 0805209999

Wright, Richard, *Native Son*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008

ISBN-10: 0061148504

ISBN-13: 978-0061148507

NB: e-books are not acceptable for scholarly work unless they include page numbers for reference purposes.

In addition, there are several texts posted on Blackboard as pdf (**please download and print these --- see below**):

- Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*
- Aristotle, *Poetics* (selections)
- Camus, Albert, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (selections)
- Fanon, Frantz, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man"
- Kierkegaard, Soren, "Ancient Tragedy's Reflection in the Modern"
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy* (abridged)

I may post additional short texts to Blackboard as the semester progresses.

Readings on BB: Beginning in Week Three we will be using texts printed from Blackboard. Unless you have copies of the original source material (i.e. books), **you will be responsible for printing off each of the readings listed above so that you have a paper copy to work with in class.**

Please note: this is a course requirement. We will be doing close work with the texts both in class and for assignments. In addition, ***all laptops, phones and other electronic devices must be turned off during class time***, so you must have a paper copy of each class reading with you.

Printing costs should not exceed \$11 (in total), based on the JC print costs of 10c per page. A proportion of your participation grade will be attached to producing your own portfolio of readings (see section on participation below). Checklists for the portfolio will be distributed at the first class.

Course Reading Expectations

The schedule of readings is given below. I will expect you to have done the set reading before the relevant class. This means reading through the set text or texts *at least* once; going back and re-reading either the whole text, or the passages that seem especially important/difficult/puzzling/interesting to you; and writing down your thoughts and questions on the text (I recommend keeping a notebook just for your reading notes for this course that you can bring to class as a reminder of what you want to ask or comment on).

If you don't have questions, you're not reading properly! If you do the reading in advance, you will get a lot more out of classes, because you will have a lot more to put in.

Questions and Problems:

If you have a question about the course, or a problem with a class or assignment, please do one or more of the following:

- ask in class (often others will have the same question/concern, so this will help everyone)
- email me with a question or query: kbrandho@gmu.edu
- come and see me in my open office hours or email me for an appointment

I will respond to emails as soon as I reasonably can, though as a general rule I will not answer emails in the late evening or between Saturday morning and Sunday evening. This means you need to plan ahead – *please don't leave questions about assignments or reading until the last minute!*

COURSEWORK AND GRADING

Basic breakdown:

| | |
|--|----------|
| 1. Attendance: | 0% |
| 2. Participation: | 5% |
| 3. Two Comprehension Quizzes (one on Camus and one on Fanon) | 5% each |
| 4. Sophocles/Aeschylus Worksheet | 10% |
| 5. Mid Term | 20% |
| 6. Two Response Papers: | 15% each |
| 7. Final Paper | 25% |

1) Attendance:

There are no points for showing up. However, showing up has value for all other aspects of assessment and you should not expect to do well on the course if you miss classes. **In addition, points can be lost for not showing up:** we only have 28 class meetings on the material of the course; every absence after the second will result in a 10% penalty in the participation grade. Hence 12 absences would result in a 100% reduction of the participation grade. Regarding the penalty, extenuating circumstances will be considered in line with University policies but cannot make up for the effect that an absence has in understanding the material.

Also, this is not a distance learning course and so, in order to pass the course, **you must attend at least 12 classes.**

2) Participation:

Class discussion is an essential feature of the course and I will regularly invite participation. Please come prepared to discuss the material as assigned and be ready to take part in classroom activities. This means both reading and thinking about the texts in advance of the class meeting. Participation is distinct from both presence and mere talk. There may be short reading quizzes from time to time and I will be using Blackboard to set reading/discussion questions each week. You will be expected to participate in these Blackboard discussions: post a serious and meaningful comment for at least 8 of the 14 weeks to receive participation points.

Portfolio of readings: as noted above, from Week 3 onwards you are responsible for printing off the set readings for each class (all readings will be available on BB). A checklist of the required readings will be provided in class 1. As having a paper copy of the text to work with in class is essential, 1/5 of your of your participation grade will be dependent on producing your own portfolio of course readings. Once you have printed off the readings for the course, you should ask another member of the class to check your portfolio is complete, sign off the check list for you, and hand it to me. **This must be completed by the end of class on Thursday September 6 (week 2).**

3) Comprehension Quizzes

There will be short comprehension quizzes on the work of Camus and Fanon. These will be text based and open book.

4) Sophocles/Aeschylus Worksheet:

At the end of our classes on Sophocles and Aeschylus there will be a worksheet with several text-based questions. This will cover the material in all three of the assigned plays. This is a take-home assignment.

5) Mid Term

At the end of our classes on Aristotle there will be a take-home mid term exam. This will cover Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Aristotle and will consist of 5 or 6 short answer questions.

6) Response Papers:

During the course of the semester 3 response paper topics will be assigned (see course outline below for dates); **you will be expected to complete 2 of these assignments.** The responses will be 3-4 typed pages and will involve no more than 25% summary of the assigned text: analysis, evaluation and critical explication are expected (this is an occasion for you to demonstrate thought as well as understanding). These assignments will have firm due dates and no responses will normally be accepted late without specific extenuating circumstances --- please contact me if you are not able to meet the deadline. **NB: I will answer content and formal questions about these papers in advance of the due date but under normal circumstances I will not read drafts for these papers --- this is a matter of volume and fairness; I may, however, propose to you as an individual that you should submit a draft. My office hours (see above) are a good time to meet to discuss your ideas and pose questions.**

7) Final Paper

The final paper of 5-7 pages will be based on Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Guidelines will be distributed after Thanksgiving but papers will be expected to develop a reading of *Native Son* based on previous work in the course. That is, your paper should incorporate themes, concepts and ideas drawn from earlier in this course.

*) Plagiarism

This is a major violation of trust and academic integrity. Do not present others' work as your own. Passive Plagiarism (failing to cite sources) is as bad as Active Plagiarism (downloading an essay off the internet). **For acceptable citation models, see Purdue University Online Writing Lab (Purdue OWL), "Research and Citation":**

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>

Also, work submitted for this course must be uniquely created for this course. If I suspect plagiarism I will inform you and the university administration in writing. **NB: I reserve the right to conduct an oral examination on any piece of work.**

The Honor Code: "All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code. You can find a copy of the Honor Code at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review."

Commitment to Diversity

In keeping with the general ethos of the University, this class seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across differences. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

NB This does not mean not being critical: respecting others' views means taking them seriously, and taking them seriously means thinking about their strengths and weaknesses, asking questions, and offering constructive criticisms or alternative viewpoints where appropriate. It also means thinking about where the views of others challenge our own, and being open to what they have to teach us. Valuing diversity is not just an attitude – it is a matter of developing an active practice. Amongst other things, this practice involves:

- learning to listen to other perspectives;
- being open to criticism of one's own views;
- being willing to evaluate different positions while being unsure where one stands;
- having good reasons for one's views, but being willing to change one's mind;
- not rushing to judgment;
- basing critical comments or questions on as good an understanding of another person (or text or theory) as one can manage;
- *and* being willing to accept that there will always be things one cannot see or understand;
- learning to express criticisms and differences of opinion in ways that are not personal or hurtful and that leave space for other voices.

Never be afraid to ask a question or to risk saying something that might be wrong – that is how we learn. But equally, never be afraid to listen to the questions and answers of others, and to let their views challenge and change how you think.

Submitting Written Work

All written assignments must be submitted on the Blackboard site for this course by the relevant deadline (see course schedule below). There will be a clearly marked section on Blackboard for each assignment.

Unless otherwise specified, one paper copy must also be handed in at class or to the PHIL 253 course essay box in the Philosophy Office (Robinson B 465) during office hours (9am-4pm, weekdays). Papers will be read and graded in batches. In order to be considered part of the first batch, the paper copy should normally be handed in by 4pm on the day of the deadline.

Please note:

- The **date of submission** will be taken from when you upload the work on Blackboard. If there is a system problem that means you can't upload the work, let me know by email and attach a copy of your work.
- Once a paper copy is submitted, you can expect feedback/comments and notice of your grade. For paper copies submitted on the due date, I make every effort to mark and return this work within 2 weeks. Paper copies submitted after the due date but before the end of the semester go to the end of the grading queue (note that I have 4 classes this semester) and will be returned as soon as possible. If no paper copy is submitted by the end of the semester a grade will still be entered but you will not get feedback/comments on your work.

Extensions can be arranged in exceptional circumstances if you have a good reason for submitting work late but you must let me know (by email is fine). Extensions cannot be given beyond the last day of the exam period. **Whenever possible it is much better to try to arrange an extension with me in advance.** This will make things less stressful for all concerned: you will be able to plan your assignments more effectively; I will be able to plan my grading and give better (less rushed) feedback.

Sexual Misconduct and Interpersonal Violence

George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination, and we are committed to a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support. University Policy 1202 Sexual Harassment and Misconduct (<http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/sexual-harassment-policy/>) speaks to the specifics of our process, our resources, and the options available to you.

Confidential student resources are available on campus at the Student Support and Advocacy Center (<http://ssac.gmu.edu/>), Counseling and Psychological Services (<http://caps.gmu.edu/>), and Student Health Services (<http://shs.gmu.edu/>).

All other members of the University community (including faculty, except those noted above) are **not** considered confidential resources and are **required** to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator. For a full list of resources, support opportunities, and reporting options, contact Dr. Jennifer Hammat, Title IX Coordinator, at <http://diversity.gmu.edu/title-ix>, at 703-993-8730, or in the Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics office in the Aquia Building, Suite 373.

COURSE OUTLINE

NB: The reading schedule is subject to change

WEEK ONE

Reading: Course Syllabus
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*

Aug 28: INTRODUCTION

Aug 30: Oedipus, Fate and Tragedy

WEEK TWO

Reading: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*

Sep 4: Oedipus & Antigone

Sep 6: *Antigone* and Justice

WEEK THREE

Reading: Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*

Sep 11: *The Eumenides*

Sep 13: *The Eumenides*

WORKSHEET ASSIGNED

WEEK FOUR

Reading: Aristotle, *Poetics* (pdf)

Sep 18: Aristotle character and action

WORKSHEET DUE

Sep 20: Aristotle and Catharsis

MID TERM ASSIGNED

WEEK FIVE

Reading: Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

Sep 25: Apollo and Dionysus

Sep 27: The Apollinian and Dionysian

MID TERM DUE

WEEK SIX

Reading: Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*
Kierkegaard, "Ancient Tragedy's Reflection in the Modern" (pdf)

Oct 2: Tragedy and the Human Condition

FIRST RESPONSE PAPER ASSIGNED

Oct 4: Tragedy and the Modern Subject

WEEK SEVEN

Reading: Kierkegaard, "Ancient Tragedy's Reflection in the Modern" (pdf)

Oct 9: **NO CLASS**

Oct 11: Internal and External Responsibility
FIRST RESPONSE PAPER DUE

WEEK EIGHT

Reading: Kierkegaard, "Ancient Tragedy's Reflection in the Modern" (pdf)
Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 3-22, and 51-65

Oct 16: The Ancient in the Modern
SECOND RESPONSE PAPER ASSIGNED

Oct 18: The Absurd and the Meaning of Life

WEEK NINE

Reading: Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 3-22, 51-65 and 119-123 (pdf)

Oct 23: Absurd Freedom
SECOND RESPONSE PAPER DUE

Oct 25 The Myth of Sisyphus
CAMUS COMPREHENSION QUIZ

WEEK TEN

Reading: Kafka, *The Trial*, pp. 3-110

Oct 30: Kafka

Nov 1: Kafka

WEEK ELEVEN

Reading: Kafka, *The Trial*, 111-231

Nov 6: Kafka

Nov 8: Kafka
THIRD RESPONSE PAPER ASSIGNED

WEEK TWELVE

Reading: Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" (pdf)

Nov 13: Fanon: Introduction

Nov 15: Fanon: Lived Experience
THIRD RESPONSE PAPER DUE

WEEK THIRTEEN

Reading: Wright, *Native Son*, pp. 7-195

Nov 20: Fanon: *Black Skin*

FANON COMPREHENSION QUIZ

Nov 22: **NO CLASS**

WEEK FOURTEEN

Reading: Wright, *Native Son*, pp 7-195

Nov 27: *Native Son*

Nov 29: *Native Son*

WEEK FIFTEEN

Reading: Wright, *Native Son*, pp 196-430

Dec 4: *Native Son*

Dec 6: *Native Son*

FINAL PAPER DUE TUESDAY DEC 11th