**SYLLABUS**

**PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE 253 – 04 (16357)**

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**

**SPRING 2023**

**MW 3.00 – 4.15 PM INNOVATION HALL # 207**

Dr. Marek Sojka

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Office hours: by appointment and after our class

**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, poem) 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, Miłosz and others. This course will combine the elements of lecture, class discussion, close reading and analysis of the text and students’ group 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. B. Magee: *The Story of Philosophy*

**OPTIONAL TEXTS:**

A Dictionary of Philosophy (any)

Cz. Miłosz: *The Captive Mind*

**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 two written in-class exams – each worth 20 points. These exams will be a combination of short/mini essays based on our readings, class lectures and discussions, plus a few one - paragraph answers on understanding of various philosophical/literary terms and genres. You will be given a choice in selection of the questions to address.

There will be a research paper (approximately 5 – 7 pages long) due at the end of the semester on one of the questions from the list I will post on Blackboard (at least one month before the end of the semester) and will discuss in class.

Each student (assigned in groups of three or four) will choose one topic from a list provided for a class presentation (along with a 2 pages long report/summary due the day of your presentation). 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 published on Blackboard and 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, Social Realism in Literature and Art. You may organize your project as a power point presentation, use handouts, show short fragments from films, read and comment on a poem or other format as you feel best depicts your topic. I will meet with each group of the presenters to suggest some ideas you could present in class.

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, sign in the list of attendance (I will circular it in class) and do not leave the class earlier.

The remaining 10 points will be distributed between two or three short in class pop quizzes or T/F questions.

Regardless of the reason for 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/Essays: 3 x 20 = 60 points

Presentation: 20 points

Attendance: 10 points

Quizzes: 10 points

100 Points Total

**COLLEGE POLICIE**S **(and mine):**

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, join our classes, be active, bring your questions and participate actively in class discussions.

**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**: I will try to follow our timetable as close as possible but at the same time depending on circumstances we should be open and flexible. Therefore, the amount of time we will spend on each topic may vary. Please, be also aware that, depending on your questions and our discussions, we will address many philosophical issues not listed in the syllabus or discussed in your textbooks. Therefore, please, never ask questions “Why are we discussing this material?” or “Is this going to be on the test?”

**Class cancellation**: If I have to cancel class, I will notify you in class, by email or through Blackboard.

**Email etiquette:** When you contact me through email, please do not write: “Hi, I missed last class. Can you tell me what we covered?” If you miss a class, find out what you missed from your classmate, or from the syllabus. Exchange your phone numbers and/or email addresses with your classmates, so you would be able to contact them if you miss a class.

Please, be aware of email etiquette and **always identify yourself in your email, by full name, class, campus, and the day/time of class.** I teach many classes in many places and am not a *clairvoyant* to guess your name. Emails without your name, campus and class time or section (I also teach at NOVA) will be considered anonymous and will remain unanswered.

Please, remember that I am not chained to my computer 24 hours, 7 days per week. Therefore, please, have some patience (which is important moral virtue - and actually, we will discuss Aristotelian Ethics of Virtue) and consideration. I will answer your emails within two days (with the exception of the weekends). I also hope that most of your questions we will be able to answer or discuss in class or after the class.

**My office hours**: You can always (anytime during our class session) ask me any (almost any) question in class. I would like to make our classes as interactive and live as possible. I will be available MW 1.30 PM – 2.30 PM (approximately) at the Department of Philosophy in The Horizon Hall, 6-th floor. You can also make an appointment with me.

**Computer glitches**: Please, be aware of my unusual and fragile relation with computers, internet, Blackboard, Zoom, Canvas, I-Phones and, generally speaking, the entire digital technology. On the other hand, I still know how to fix simple components of my car (with the exception of the engine, transmission or clutch) on the driveway, a gas dryer in my basement, traditional mechanic alarm clock, or many of my other household gadgets. Therefore please, have patience, understanding and consideration if something goes wrong with our communication on Blackboard.

**STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE PHI 253 04 3.00 PM INNOV. 207**

This is an approximate time frame. The amount of time we will spend on each topic may vary. In addition to readings listed below, I will post on BB many links to extra sources (short videos or essays to read/browse).

For each module I will also provide you with more specific Study Guides. They will include more specific topics we will discuss in class, philosophical and literary terms and some questions for our class discussions. In other words: I will update you each week regarding your reading assignments and ideas we will discuss in class the following week.

**MODULE I January 23 - February 22:**

Jan 23 and 25: Introduction. Philosophy. Empirical sciences. Literature

Jan 31, Feb 1 and 6: Branches of Philosophy. Philosophical vocabulary (a few

Important philosophical and literary terms)

Importance of liberal arts and liberal education. Aesthetics –

Short history

Read: *Aesthetics* from Wikipedia

Magee: p. 6 – 19 and: Nietzsche p. 172 - 179

Feb 8 and 13: Greco Roman philosophical schools of philosophy: The Cynics,

The Skeptics, The Epicureans, The Stoics, The Sophists.

Read: Magee 40 – 47 and Fragments from Marcus

Aurelius

Feb 15: Socrates trial and interpretation of his famous aphorisms

Read: Plato: *Apology* and: Magee: 20 - 23

Feb 20 and 22: *Plato: The Republic.* Role and function of poetry in the society.

Cognitive character of poetry/literature? Censorship.

Analysis of Plato’s myths in *The Republic*: Allegory of the Cave, Story of Gyges, Myth of Er, Noble Lie (interpretations)

Read: fragments from *The Republic* (page numbers

according to Stephanus pagination):

JUSTICE: 327 – 367,

CENSORSHIP: 376 – 403

RULERS: 412 – 427

SOUL: 434 - 440

CAVE: 514 – 521

THE MYTH OF ER: 613 – 620

Read also: Magee: 24 – 31

Overview for the first exam

**First in class exam: Monday, February 27 - 20 point**

**MODULE II - March 1 – March 27**

General intro to philosophy of Aristotle (Metaphysics, Ethics, Social and Political

Philosophy, Aesthetics. Literary criticism)

Read: Magee: 32 - 39

Read: Aristotle: *Poetics* (any edition)

Greek tragedy and theater. We will analyze *Oedipus* *Rex* and *Antigone* in the light of

Aristotelian categories in *Poetics*

Read: *Oedipus Rex* and: *Antigone*

Overview for second exam

**Second in class exam: Monday, March 27 - 20 points**

**MODULE III - March 29 – May 3** -

**PRESENTATIONS AND CLASS DISCUSSIONS**

March 29: Guidelines for presentations

April 3: Antiquity. Read: Magee: 1- 47 (one more time)

April 5: Medieval philosophy and literature. Read: Mage: 49 – 61

April 10: Renaissance. Read: Magee: 63 – 73

April 12: Enlightenment. Read: *Candide and:* Magee*: 96 – 109, 122 - 123, 126 – 129*

April 17: Romanticism. Magee:132 - 137, 158 – 163

April 19: Utopia in philosophy, literature and film - Read: online research on G. Orwell

April 24: Existentialism. Magee:172 - 179, 208 - 219

April 26: Social and socialist realism – literature, architecture, film. Magee: 164 - 171

May 1: Miłosz and Polish literature and film

May 3: **Last class. Final paper due - 20 points**

**Final paper/essay due: Wednesday, May 3 - in class**

During the Module III there will be 2 short in class pop quizzes – on *Candide* and on

Existentialism - each worth 5 points

Lastday to drop with 100% tuition refund: February 6

Last day to drop with 50% tuition refund: February 13

Spring Break: March 13 - March 19 - no classes