Philosophy and Literature

Of late there has been talk of philosophy’s being at an end or at least in need of transformation. In order to provide a measure of renewal, practitioners are considering whether approaches taken and insights expressed in literature might enrich the study of philosophy. We will explore this issue through an examination of philosophical and literary treatments of friendship from different periods in the Western tradition, and of literary and philosophical reflections on human flourishing in the twentieth century. Since twentieth-century discussions devote much consideration to the role of interpersonal connections in the optimal human life, our exploration of these treatments will be strongly connected to our investigation of friendship. Building on this foundation, we will then consider work by contemporary philosophers on the topic of what literature might have to contribute to the philosophical enterprise.

Required Texts


In addition, certain readings will be available on e-reserve or distributed in class.

**Schedule**

**Introduction** (Jan. 30-Feb. 4):
  a) Plato, *Republic,* Books 2-3 and 10

**Unit 1**—Philosophical and Literary Treatments of Friendship (Feb. 6-27):
  a) Sophocles, *Philoctetes*; Julius Moravcsik, “Development of Friendship and Values in the *Philoctetes*” and David Konstan’s commentary (on e-reserve)
  c) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII and IX, and *Rhetoric* II.4 (in *Other Selves,* pp. 28-76)
  d) Cicero, “On Friendship” (*De Amicitia*) (in *Other Selves,* pp. 77-116)
  f) William Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*
  g) Edith Wharton, “Friends” (in *Women’s Friendships: A Collection of Short Stories,* ed. Susan Koppelman, pp. 72-91—one on e-reserve)
  h) Montaigne, “Of Friendship” (in *Other Selves,* pp. 185-99)
  i) Immanuel Kant, Lecture on Friendship (in *Other Selves,* pp. 208-17)
  j) Hermann Hesse, *Narcissus and Goldmund*

**Unit 2**—Reflections by Twentieth-century Authors on the Topic of Human Flourishing (Mar. 4-Apr. 15; Spring Break, Mar. 15-23):
  a) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* sections 9-16 (pp. 67-107); I.4 (pp. 149-68); I.5 (pp. 169-224) (on e-reserve)
  b) Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*
  c) Franz Kafka, *The Trial*
  d) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* II.1-2 (pp. 274-348) (on e-reserve)
  e) Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus”
f) Albert Camus, *The Fall*

g) Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

h) Robertson Davies, *The Manticore*

i) Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

j) Hans-Georg Gadamer, selections from *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary* and *Praise of Theory: Speeches and Essays* (on e-reserve)

Unit 3—What Literature Can Contribute to the Philosophical Enterprise (Ap. 17-May 1):

- Anthony Cunningham, “Reading for Life,” *The Heart of What Matters: The Role for Literature in Moral Philosophy*, pp. 69-92, 284-5 (to be distributed in class)
- additional material to be assigned

Requirements

1) Regular and spirited attendance! Everyone should come to each class meeting prepared to discuss and assess the views presented in the readings. Consistent attendance and thoughtful participation will make up 20% of the final grade. As the use of laptops and other electronic devices in class can pose a distraction, I would ask that they not be employed.

2) One in-class presentation—15%. (Date: Depends on when you sign up to do one.)

3) Two 6-8 page papers, due in class on Tuesday, March 4 and Thursday, April 17—20% each.

4) One 10-page paper, due at my office (Dewey 203) by noon on Friday, May 9—25%.

Alternatively, you may submit the paper via email, but if you do so, be sure that you send it from your Smith account and that you receive email confirmation of receipt from me.

**Note**: Grades on late papers (i.e., those turned in at any point after they are due) will be lowered one step (e.g., from A- to B+) each day.

Items on Reserve in Neilson Library


