

PHIL 581 PROBLEMS
Philosophy and Literature
Winter Term 1
Fall 2021

SYLLABUS

DRAFT: all details are provisional until the start of term

OVERVIEW

In this course, we will explore literature as a mode of philosophizing: that is to say, *a way of doing philosophy*. In many traditions of thought, novels, poetry, plays, comics, and other literary forms are used to explore and communicate philosophical theories and problems, to spark ideas and conversations, and to inspire change, both individual and social. We will study and discuss a broad range of examples of philosophical literature, analysing their various techniques, strategies, strengths, and weaknesses. Using these as a springboard, students will workshop their own philosophical creative writing to an advanced level.

Instructor:

Carrie Jenkins, carrie.jenkins@ubc.ca, she/her

Seminars:

Tuesdays 2-5pm, room TBA

Office hours:

Thursdays 2-4pm, or by appointment

I will be available both via Zoom and in person

ASSESSMENT

- Participation: 10%
 - Participate regularly and thoughtfully in the class discussions and workshops to earn this part of your grade.
 - It is expected that you will make at least a few contributions each week, but quality is more important than quantity.
- Short responses: 10%
 - Weekly written responses, of up to 500 words, to the week's set text(s).
- Presentation: 20%
 - Each week, one or more students will give a presentation on some aspect of the week's set text(s).

- Each student must present at least once. Students may present more than once if desired (and if time allows), and in that case may take the highest of their presentation grades.
- First draft of creative philosophical writing: 20%
 - Due: in relevant class (dates for workshopping first drafts will be assigned at the start of term).
 - The final piece of philosophical writing should be around **5000 words** in length. First drafts may be a little shorter or a little longer.
- Final piece of creative philosophical writing, revised taking into account feedback from instructor and peers: 40%
 - Due: **Tuesday 14th December** (end of term plus a week).
 - The final piece of philosophical writing should be around **5000 words** in length.
 - Typical submissions might be: (a) a short story, (b) a few scenes from a play, (c) a screenplay for an episode of a TV show, or (d) a synopsis for a novel together with a sample chapter or part of a chapter.
 - If you wish, you may include a short explanatory statement (up to 500 words) about the piece. This is advisable if there are elements of context that may not be evident to your readers but are important for understanding the work.
 - For **less wordy forms**, such as poetry or comics, alternative length guidelines should be agreed with the instructor prior to beginning the work.

READINGS

The reading list may be adjusted as the term proceeds, to be responsive to student interests. A full initial reading list will be provided on the first day of term, but may include such texts as:

- Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and The Good*
 - Secondary reading: *The Sovereignty of Good*
- Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- Carla Nappi, 'The Speech of Pausanias' from *Uninvited: Talking Back to Plato* [content note: gendered violence, consent violation]
- Audre Lorde, selected poems
- Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*
- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*
- Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Library of Babel' and 'The Lottery in Babylon'
- Ted Chian, 'Omphalos'
- *Philosophy Through Science Fiction Stories*, ed. Helen De Cruz, Johan De Smedt, and Eric Schwitzgebel

- Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*
- Edwin Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*

COURSE POLICIES

Creative writing grading rubric:

Some specifics will depend on genre (poetry is a different creature from fiction, for example), but in all cases the main factors for assessment will be:

- (a) creativity and compellingness of the writing,
- (b) quality of philosophical content, and
- (c) success in using the chosen form to convey the philosophical content.

If you can't do the work on time: I am happy grant extensions wherever needed. Just ask.

Note on Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments. A link about Academic misconduct is below:

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>

Mandatory Syllabus Statement about UBC's Values and Policies:

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural

observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available [here](#).

Note on atmosphere: Some of the topics of this course may comprise sensitive material for many people. While we may be examining and questioning beliefs, including some deeply-held ones, everyone has a shared responsibility to ensure that we do so with care and respect, and that our environment is a supportive one conducive to learning. No offensive jokes or comments, or other harmful behaviors with respect to race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or anything else, will be acceptable. The aim of our discussions is not to “win” arguments or to prove how smart we are, but to learn and practice our skills collaboratively with others.