

The following syllabus is the syllabus that I used for my quarter-long introduction to philosophy through literature taught at UCLA in Spring 2018.

Philosophy in Literature (lower-division course) (taught Spring 2018)

Meetings: TR 10:00-11:50, Dodd 175
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Course Description

This course explores a selection of central questions about what it means to be human. The questions we will consider include: What is happiness? Do we need to be free in order to be happy, and, if so, what sort of freedom and responsibility must I have in order to be satisfied with who I am? What sort of political circumstances do I need in order to be free? And who is the “I” who can experience freedom and happiness? As we explore these questions, we will consider what roles art, literature, and philosophy should play in figuring out how to live.

This course will address these questions by reading novels, poems, and plays (including *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Swann’s Way*, and *The Man Without Qualities*), viewing movies and paintings (including *Ikiru* and *The Music Room*), and reading some philosophy (including some Plato, some Thomas Nagel, and some Selma James). Lectures will provide a philosophical framework for approaching and engaging with the artworks that we study. Students will be encouraged to draw on their own life experience to deepen their engagement with the texts that we read.

By taking this class, students will learn: how to think philosophically about literature and movies, how to communicate clearly and persuasively about theoretical topics (orally and in writing), how to think independently about arguments and decisions, how to read literary texts with the aim of identifying their philosophical assumptions and arguments, how to write a philosophy essay, and, if all goes well, how to take pleasure in the challenges of careful and rigorous reading and thinking.

Texts

Philosophical texts, poems, and paintings will be posted on the course website, although an optional course reader will also be available from the campus bookstore, if you would like a set of the readings printed out and bound. Screenings of required films will be arranged, and films will also be on reserve at the library. The following novels need to be purchased for the class:

Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, vol. 1 (ISBN 0679767878)
Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (ISBN 0156628708)
Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way* (ISBN 0142437964)
Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (ISBN 0393352560)
Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (ISBN 1555977359)

These books will be available through the campus bookstore, and they are available used from Amazon and many other online booksellers. You will also need a notebook for the commonplace book assignment (described below).

It is important that you get a copy of the precise edition of these books listed here (that is, your copy should have the ISBN number listed above), because our discussion of these books will go best if everyone is working with the same page numbers.

It is essential that students complete the assigned reading in advance of the lectures that are devoted to the material. Many of the texts we will be reading are dense philosophical and literary texts, and I strongly encourage you to read them at least twice. (Many students find reading once before the lecture and once after to be an effective reading strategy.)

Screen Free Classroom

In order to avoid distractions and to promote lively participation, thoughtful note taking, and good cheer, I ask that you bring (1) a paper notepad, (2) a writing utensil, and (3) a paper copy of the reading to every class meeting, and **refrain from using your cell phones, tablets, and laptops in class**. Please notify your TA if special circumstances, such as an injury or a disability, require you to take notes electronically. Please also notify your TA if obtaining hard copies of the course materials poses a problem for you.

Course Requirements

The required assignments for the course, described in detail below, are the following: (1) section attendance and participation; (2) keeping a commonplace book; (3) an exam in week 4; (4) an initial topic for the final essay; (5) a finalized topic for the final essay; (6) a rough draft of the final essay; (7) a peer editing assignment based on the rough draft of the final essay; (8) an exam in week 10; and (9) a final draft of the final essay. **All course requirements must be completed in order to pass this course.**

(1) Section Attendance and Participation

By attending class and talking through the literature and philosophy that we read with me, your TA, and your fellow students, you will improve your ability to identify philosophical themes in literature with sophistication and to clearly articulate philosophical views and arguments orally. To participate effectively, it is essential to carefully read the assigned reading.

Attendance and participation grades will be based on engagement in section discussion, including actively listening to and supportively engaging with other participants, arriving fully

prepared for discussion, and routinely making comments that advance the discussion. Failure to attend section, failure to participate, and failure to engage with other participants can negatively affect your attendance and participation grade, while particularly insightful contributions and attentive engagement with other participants can positively affect your grade.

(2) Commonplace Book

A commonplace book is a notebook that collects ideas, observations, quotations and arguments and organizes them thematically. Many students and scholars kept commonplace books in the European Renaissance and early modern period, using them as a resource to store and retrieve information. You will keep a commonplace book for this class.

The goal of this assignment is to help you draw connections across the books and stories that we read, to provide a store of information and ideas that you can draw on when you write your term paper, and to provide you with an opportunity to reflect on connections between the material that we discuss in class and your own life.

There is not a single method for creating a commonplace book, but it is important that you use it regularly (two times a week at minimum, and ideally around four times a week) and that you systematically organize it.

Some suggestions for ways in which you might use your commonplace include:

- Think about the overarching philosophical questions that we consider in class (What is freedom? What is the self? How are freedom and happiness related?) and create pages or sections of your commonplace book with these headings. (If you run out of room under one heading, you can always create a continuation of that heading later on in your commonplace book.) As you read, when you find something that is related to the topic, write down the quotation or your idea along with the the author and the page number.
- If you find a particularly interesting topic or question as you read, make a new page or section in your commonplace book focused on that topic. As you find related quotations in other books that we read, add them to that section of your commonplace book. Consider writing out your reactions to the quotations you write out—does the passage make you frustrated? confused? satisfied? overjoyed? Why?
- When you come across a related idea in reading that you're doing for another class or for fun or a movie or TV show that you're watching or a conversation with friends over lunch or dinner, jot it down in the commonplace book.
- Much of our class will concern questions about how to live one's life well. Spend some time thinking about the connections between the books that we read and discussions we have and your own life. Do you agree with the theory of freedom that Musil presents in *Man without Qualities*? Write down what features of your own experience support or confound the theory.

- Many of the best commonplace books incorporate visual presentations of material, like charts, diagrams, and drawings. Consider creating graphic representations of relationships among the different theories and authors who we study.
- You can also use your commonplace book in class or in section—for instance, to jot down a question that you don't get a chance to ask, or a connection that you notice between readings and lecture.

Grading: A few times during the term, at unspecified times, commonplace books will be collected and graded for evidence that you have put effort into compiling a commonplace book that works for you. A grading rubric for commonplace books will be distributed. Because the commonplace book is an unfamiliar assignment for many students, if your commonplace book improves throughout the course, grades from later collections will replace those from earlier collections.

You should **bring your commonplace book with you to lecture every day**, both so that you can use it to take down ideas that you have during lecture and so that you can hand it in if commonplace books are collected that day.

(3) First Examination

There will be **an exam administered in class at the end of week 5**. Further details will be provided by the beginning of week 4.

(4) Initial Essay Topic

An essay is required, of 7-8 pages, double-spaced, on a topic of your choosing that grows out of one of our meetings or readings. An initial topic (just a sentence or two) is due by the beginning of our second lecture in Week 7. You will submit your initial essay topic by posting it on the discussion board on the course website.

(5) Final Essay Topic

A finalized essay topic that describes your plan for your final essay is due by the beginning of the first lecture in Week 8. The finalized essay topic should be a one-paragraph abstract or statement of a question that you plan to discuss in your final essay. You will submit your final essay topic by posting it on the discussion board on the course website. Your TA will review your essay topic and let you know if they have any concerns about the feasibility of your essay topic.

(6) First Draft of Essay

You will develop your essay ideas by helping one another with feedback on a rough draft of the essay. Giving feedback on your peers' writing also helps you to take up the perspective of the reader in thinking through what makes for a good philosophy essay. To be ready for the collaborative editing process, you will submit **a rough, first draft of your final essay (around 5-6 pages long), due through Turnitin on the course website by 5:00 pm on**

Monday of week 9. Please **also bring two hard copies to class for our first lecture in week 9.** It is crucial that you complete your draft on time and bring two copies of it with you to lecture so that you can participate in the peer editing exercise, which you must complete in order to pass the course.

(7) Peer Editing Exercise

We will have a **collaborative editing exercise in class for our first lecture of week 9.** In addition to the in-class exercise, you will **submit written comments on another student's paper by 5:00 pm on Friday of week 9.** You will submit your written comments by posting them on the discussion board on the course website. Because your partner will rely on your comments in revising their paper, extensions will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances.

(8) Second Examination

There will be **an exam administered in class at the end of week 10.** Further details will be provided by the beginning of week 9.

(9) Final Draft of Essay

The final essay, of 7-8 pages, double-spaced, is **due through Turnitin on the course website by 2:30 PM on Monday, June 11.** Aside from last minute emergencies, extensions must be arranged at least 24 hours in advance. A grading rubric for essays will be distributed in advance of the due date.

Final Grades

Final grades will be calculated by assigning the following weights to the graded assignments.

- 5% Attendance and participation in both lecture and section
- 20% Commonplace book
- 15% First exam
- 5% Peer editing assignment
- 25% Second exam
- 30% Final draft of essay

As noted above, all course requirements must be completed in order to earn a passing grade in this course.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by UCLA's policies on academic misconduct. You may wish to review the flyer on academic misconduct that has been prepared by the Dean of Students at <https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/portals/16/documents/studentguide.pdf>.

A few important reminders about academic integrity are relevant to the writing assignments for this course: You should write your own papers and properly attribute ideas and words that

you include in your writing. If you copy someone else's words into your assignment word for word, indicate that these words are a quotation, by enclosing them in quotation marks or setting them off from the text. Also provide a citation that includes enough information that your reader could locate the material that you're citing. (It is not important that you use any particular style of citation, as long as your citations provide enough information to locate the material that you are citing. For our course materials, you can just give the author's last name and a page number.) You should also provide a citation if you paraphrase someone else's idea in your own writing. If you have any questions about whether what constitutes academic misconduct, please ask.

Accessibility

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310) 825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit www.cae.ucla.edu.

Schedule of Lectures and Reading Assignments

- I. WEEK 1: Introduction to the Course; Philosophy and Literature
 - A. Lecture 1
 - 1. View selected Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin paintings (course website/reader)
 - B. Lecture 2
 - 1. No reading assignment for lecture 2. In lecture, we will view Satyajit Ray's film, *The Music Room*
- II. WEEK 2: Philosophy and Literature
 - A. Lecture 3
 - 1. Plato, *Republic* (excerpt on art) (course website/reader)
 - B. Lecture 4
 - 1. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (course website/reader)
- III. WEEK 3: Happiness
 - A. Lecture 5
 - 1. Walt Whitman, "Song of Joys" (course website/reader)
 - 2. Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric" (course website/reader)
 - 3. Philip Larkin, "High Windows" (course website/reader)
 - 4. View selected Kerry James Marshall paintings (course website/reader)
 - B. Lecture 6
 - 1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (excerpt on happiness) (course website/reader)
 - 2. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (excerpt on happiness) (course website/reader)
- IV. WEEK 4: Freedom
 - A. Lecture 7
 - 1. Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, ch. 1-19
 - B. Lecture 8
 - 1. Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, ch. 20-30, 30-36, 74
 - 2. Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck" (excerpt on freedom) (course website/reader)

- V. WEEK 5: Freedom, Continued
- A. Lecture 9
1. Akira Kurosawa, *Ikiru* (film) (a screening will be arranged early in week 5 and the film will be available on reserve in the library and on the course website)
- B. Lecture 10
1. **FIRST EXAM, TO BE HELD IN CLASS**
- VI. WEEK 6: Freedom, Continued
- A. Lecture 11
1. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 1-102
- B. Lecture 12
1. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 102-194
- VII. WEEK 7: Oppression
- A. Lecture 13
1. Selma James, "Sex, Race, and Class" (course website/reader)
 2. Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, part 1
- B. **INITIAL ESSAY TOPICS DUE ON COURSE WEBSITE BY 10:00 AM ON THURSDAY**
- C. Lecture 14
1. Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, parts 2-3
- VIII. WEEK 8: Self
- A. **FINALIZED ESSAY TOPICS DUE ON COURSE WEBSITE BY 10:00 AM ON TUESDAY**
- B. Lecture 15
1. Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, pp. 1-48
- C. Lecture 16
1. Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, pp. 49-117
- IX. WEEK 9: Self, Continued
- A. **ROUGH DRAFT DUE ON COURSE WEBSITE BY 5:00 PM ON MONDAY**
- B. Lecture 17
1. **PEER EDITING WORKSHOP IN CLASS (BRING TWO HARD COPIES OF YOUR ROUGH DRAFT TO CLASS)**
- C. Lecture 18
1. Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*, pp. 1-73
- D. **PEER EDITING COMMENTS DUE ON COURSE WEBSITE BY 5:00 PM ON FRIDAY**
- X. WEEK 10: Self, Continued
- A. Lecture 19
1. Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*, pp. 74-143
- B. Lecture 20
1. **SECOND EXAM, TO BE HELD IN CLASS**
- XI. FINALS WEEK
- A. **FINAL DRAFT OF ESSAY DUE ON COURSE WEBSITE BY 2:30 PM ON MONDAY, JUNE 11**

Grading Rubric for Essays

A, A-	Excellent essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is straightforward and easy to read. • Essay is clearly organized so that paragraphs clearly flow from one another and the reader is never lost. • Essay topic clearly sets out a significant philosophical problem or question and makes the reader care about it. • Exposition shows mastery of the philosophical and literary materials used and conveys complete comprehension to the reader. Exposition provides a new point of access to the material discussed. • Essay advances an insightful, creative, or very thoughtful philosophical argument that is well supported. Demonstrates awareness of significant objections to the position it advances and responds effectively to them.
B+, B, B-	Good essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is readable, although some sentences may be difficult. • Essay is coherently organized, but the reader is sometimes lost. • Essay topic sets out a significant philosophical problem or question, although the essay may fail to show the reader why they should care about the topic. • Exposition of philosophical and literary materials contains no major mistakes and effectively conveys the central arguments and themes to the reader. • Essay advances a philosophical argument and provides support for it although the argument might contain minor errors or need more development in places. Demonstrates independent thought about the topic and awareness of significant objections to the position it advances.
C+, C, C-	Adequate essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is very difficult but not impossible to read. Many sentences are convoluted or ungrammatical. • Essay is poorly organized and the reader is often lost. • Essay topic provides an opportunity to exposit and argue about course materials but is not otherwise philosophically significant. • Exposition shows a grasp of the central arguments and themes of the philosophical and literary texts discussed but does not effectively convey it to the reader. • Essay advances a philosophical argument. There may be serious problems with the argument, but the argument has promise of amounting to more than mere counter-assertion. Essay rehashes reading or lecture material rather than demonstrating independent thought about the topic.
D+ or lower	Inadequate essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is very difficult but not impossible to read. Most sentences are convoluted or ungrammatical and it is very difficult for the reader to understand the author's meaning. • Essay is unorganized and it is unclear to the reader why one paragraph follows another. • Essay topic poses a coherent question but is unrelated to the philosophical or literary themes of the course. • Exposition fails to show a grasp of the central arguments and themes of the philosophical and literary texts discussed. • Essay makes large argumentative errors or amounts to mere counter-assertion and fails to demonstrate original thought about the material.
F	Failing essay	Essay does not make a good faith effort to meet the requirements of the assignment.

Grading Rubric for Attendance and Participation

A	Excellent participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student almost always attends class. • Student is engaged in discussion, including actively listening to and supportively engaging with other participants, arriving fully prepared for discussion, and routinely making comments that advance the discussion.
B	Good participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student attends class most of the time. • Student treats other students respectfully but does not regularly engage with other participants or contribute to discussion.
C	Adequate participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student only irregularly attends class. • Student treats other students respectfully but does not regularly engage with other participants or contribute to discussion.
F	Inadequate participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student never attends class or does not treat other students respectfully in discussion.

Grading Rubric for Commonplace Books

A	Excellent commonplace book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonplace book shows evidence of thinking deeply and independently about philosophical questions considered in class and how they connect to the literary texts that we read. • Commonplace book engages with all or almost all of the assigned reading for the course. • Commonplace book shows evidence of regular, ongoing student engagement.
B	Good commonplace book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonplace book shows evidence of thinking about philosophical questions considered in class and how they connect to the literary texts that we read. • Commonplace book engages with the majority of the assigned reading for the course. • Commonplace book shows evidence of moderate student engagement.
C	Adequate commonplace book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonplace book shows intermittent evidence of thinking about philosophical questions considered in class and how they connect to the literary texts that we read. • Commonplace book engages with some of the assigned reading for the course. • Commonplace book shows evidence of student engagement.
F	Inadequate participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonplace book does not show evidence of thinking about philosophical questions considered in class and how they connect to the literary texts that we read. • Commonplace book does not show evidence that that the student has completed assigned reading for the course. • Commonplace book does not show evidence of regular engagement with readings or lectures.