

(How) Can Literature Convey Philosophy?

Fall 2018, Monday 3:30 – 5:10 p.m.

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2 credits, 4 ECTS credits: no pre-requisites or co-requisites; course level: PhD

Course Description: Can literature, and more generally art, be philosophical? If so, how? Given that philosophy is thought to be all about argument and given that literature largely does not do arguments but something rather different, a puzzle is generated about how literature can be philosophical. One answer would be to say that philosophy is about more than argument which re-raises the question about what philosophy is. Another line of investigation would be to take a close look at purportedly philosophical literature (and art) so as to ask how exactly it manages to do philosophy. Does literature simply *illustrate* philosophical claims, problems or ideas? Or does literature do something deeper than that? Does it “enact” philosophy in a way that is not reducible to either argument or illustration. Further, when literature is philosophical, is its philosophical achievement communicable by non-literary means? Another line of questioning is this: Is there always a clear division between the genres of philosophy and literature? For instance, does Plato’s *Apology* or *Symposium* belong to only one of these genres? The plan is to proceed on two tracks: We will read classical and contemporary philosophy such as Plato’s *Ion*, sections from Kant’s 3rd Critique on “aesthetic ideas”, Wittgenstein, Arthur Danto and John Gibson. Concurrently, I’ll assign literature for us to discuss, primarily poetry and short fiction, but maybe we’ll also dabble in a film or modern painting or sculpture. This is a new course, so students’ suggestions are particularly welcome on either philosophy or literature/arts. As for the place of the course in the overall program of study: It deals with aesthetics, meta-philosophy as well as various more specific topics depending on the literature or art in question.

Goals of the course: To develop a clearer picture of how philosophy can operate and whether literature and the arts can be philosophical and, if so, how they do so. As in other courses, to improve techniques of reading, critical thinking and writing.

Learning outcome: The desired outcome is to realize the goals of the course.

Teaching format: seminar-style discussion

Requirements and assessment: Students are required to attend classes, do assigned reading before each class. They are strongly encouraged to take part in discussion. Students are also required to give one class presentation (15 minutes) NOT to summarize the reading but to respond to it. Students are required to write a 2000 word term paper. Grade is based on discussion (10%), class presentation (10%), term paper (80%). Criteria for term paper evaluation include clarity, originality, depth and coherence.

- Wk 1 Sep 17 M Introduction to course and the philosophical issues
- Wk 2 Sep 24 M Plato Ion, excerpts from the Republic
- Wk 3 Oct 1 M The Question of Genre: Arthur Danto, "Philosophy as/and/of Literature"
- Wk 4 Oct 8 M Defining Literature: Peter Lamarque, "Literature" from Philosophy of Literature
- Wk 5 Oct 15 M Aesthetic Ideas: Kant, Critique of Judgment, sections 46-54
- Wk 6 Oct 22 M (holiday to be rescheduled) Poetry: John Gibson, "What Makes a Poem Philosophical"
- Wk 7 Oct 29 M Poetry and Metaphysics: Margaret Cavendish, Samuel Coleridge
- Wk 8 Nov 5 M Poetry and Philosophy: Christopher Norris, "Poetry, Philosophy and Creative Thinking"
- Wk 9 Nov 12 M Existentialist Literature: Jean-Paul Sartre
- Wk 10 Nov 19 M Social Philosophy and the Visual Arts: Adrian Piper, interviews and art
- Wk 11 Nov 26 M open – to be determined by consensus
- Wk 12 Dec 3 M open – to be determined by consensus