Syllabus

PH 881 – TOPICS IN PHILOSOPHY – Fall 2008
Wednesday 6:00-9:00, room STH 541

Professor Charles Griswold (griswold@bu.edu)
Office: room 624, School of Theology
Office hours: Tuesday 12:30-1:30; W. 1-2; Thursday 4:00-5:00; and by appointment

Our questions will include these: what are the principles of sound (textual) interpretation? What do those principles assume about the nature of a well composed account? Is the principle of "authorial intent" defensible? Why would a philosopher write in literary form? What is narrative, how does it unify, how does it explain (if at all), how does it provide understanding? In what ways may it be an illuminating way of understanding the unity, value, and meaning of a life? We will discuss the notion of being the "author" of one's life (as distinguished from, say, a character in a play whose overall plot one cannot understand), as well as the connection between narrative and the emotions, and between narrative and perspective. Contemporary philosophical work will be read in conjunction with classical texts, putting the historical and contemporary into dialogue. This seminar is required of all first year PhD students, and is open only to them. Particular emphasis will be placed on developing research skills, public presentation skills, the ability to formulate a clear and concise argument, the use of secondary sources, and an understanding of what it means to prepare a paper for publication in a refereed journal.

REQUIRED BOOKS (available in paperback at the University bookstore)


ISBN 978-0521714099


RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Griswold, C. *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007).
ISBN 978-0-5-21703512


Additional texts will be distributed during the semester.
RESERVE LIST FOR PH457 (MUGAR LIBRARY, 2 hour reserve)
* = confirmed to be on reserve, the others in transit.

16) Ricoeur, P. *Time and Narrative* vol. II. Univ. of Chicago Press. 1985

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

[1] **Sept. 3** Hermeneutic issues: what is “the author,” and does “authorial intent” matter? What are the criteria for defensible interpretation? Why might a philosopher write in literary form?

http://www.jstor.org/stable/2026619
[2] Sept. 10  classical sources: mimesis, narrative, the engagement of the emotions

(a) Plato, *Republic*, selections from bks. II and III, 376e-403c
(b) Plato, *Republic* bk. X, 603c-608a
(c) Plato, *Phaedrus* 264c, on “organic unity”: what is “unity”? 
Trans. Woodruff and Nehamas (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995).


(a) Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapters 1-13 (pp. 31-45), and Halliwell’s comments on those chapters (his commentary begins on p. 69).


Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapters 14-26 (pp. 45-68), and Halliwell’s comments on those chapters


(a) P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, ch. 2 (“Emplotment: a Reading of Aristotle’s Poetics,” pp. 31-51).
(b) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, ch. 3 (“Time and Narrative: Threefold Mimesis,” pp. 52-87).
(c) P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, ch. 1 (“Reading for the Plot,” pp. 3-36).

[6] Oct. 8  narrative, ethics, the unity of self

(a) A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, ch. 15, pp. 204-225.
(b) P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, ch. 6 (“The Self and Narrative Identity,” pp. 140-68).

[7] Oct. 15  criticisms of narrativism

[8] Oct. 22  the debate continued


[9] Oct. 29  the debate continued

(a) Sartre, J. P. Nausea (selections)
(c) Rousseau, Confessions p. 3; bk I, pp. 5-7; and the Appendix (pp. 643-649).
(d) Plato’s Phaedo, esp. the closing scene, and the assertion that philosophy is the practice for dying and death (64a, 67e)

[10] Nov. 5  how does the explanatory and unifying work of narrative involve the emotions and perspective?


[11] Nov. 12  narrative and the emotions (cont.)

(b) C. Griswold, “Forgiveness, Narrative, and Ideals,” in Forgiveness, pp. 98-110.

[12] Nov. 19  narrative and the value of a life

(b) McMahan, J. The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margin of Life (Oxford University Press, 2002), ch. 2.6.2, pp. 174-188 (“Narrative Unity: Retroactive Effects, Desert, and Desire”). The full text of this book is available at Oxford Scholarship Online; see http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780195079982/p051.html If that doesn’t open, find the book in Mugar’s on-line catalogue, click on the link that appears, then type in BU log-in name and password.
[Nov. 26-30, Thanksgiving break]

[13] Dec. 3  beginning, middle, and end in life: is death a disruption of unity, or a precondition of it? Is death to be feared?

(b) Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

[14] Dec. 10  beginning, middle, and end in life, cont.: would deathlessness (immortality) be better, other things being equal? And so, a narrative without an ending?

   http://books.google.com/books?id=B9vHZd2UJ3sC&pg=PA331&lpg=PA331&dq=williaims,+The+Makropulos+Case&source=web&ots=aoKRLr7Idm&sig=PzgT18ySgxucnwpIUXaLf2NpQd0&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=6&ct=result#PPA331,M1

SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS

(a) A one-page paper (double spaced) due at the start of each class (13 papers total), explaining the argument—or a central argument—of one of the readings or a section thereof. Please bring 7 copies for the other members of the class. It is anticipated that you will be asked to read your analysis to the group, and defend it, at least every other class. When you present in class, your grade for the paper will reflect the quality of your presentation. (40% of the final grade)

Late papers will be docked one full grade for each day they are late. (A paper is late if it is turned in after the start of class on the day it is due.) Electronic submissions will not be accepted unless there is an emergency. (Printer problems do not qualify as emergencies.)

(b) A term paper of no more than 10 pages in length, double spaced. You must clear the topic with the instructor in advance. The paper is due Dec. 17 at noon in my office (you may also leave it by then in my department mailbox). (40% of the final grade)

(c) This seminar places great emphasis on class participation; it is assumed that you will attend all sessions, come well prepared to contribute, and participate every class. (20% of the final grade)

(d) You must attend at least two philosophy colloquia offered by the Department during the Fall semester.

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SOME OTHER RELEVANT TEXTS

**on narrative:**


Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Special Issue: *Narrative Endings* 33, No. 1 June 1978: 1-158.


Other relevant work:


*Other philosophical work on the fear of death, mortality, etc:*

SOME WEB RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH IN PHILOSOPHY
(nb: some of the most recent issues of these resources are available only in the library, not on-line)

- To search BU’s libraries: http://library.bu.edu/ (includes ability to search libraries of other institutions)

- For a useful list of links to philosophy databases, see the link through the BU library:
  http://www.bu.edu/dbin/ejournals/esources/display5xyPD.php?gu_id=96&indexp=96^Philosophy


- Revue Philosophique de Louvain (http://www.uclouvain.be/34348.html)


- JSTOR (journal articles on line) http://www.jstor.org/

- The Philosopher’s Index (http://www.philinfo.org/); for hardcopy, see Mugar library.
  For free access, try
  http://www.bu.edu/dbin/ejournals/esources/display5xyPD.php?gu_id=96&indexp=96^Philosophy
  The Index provides summaries of many articles (it seeks to be comprehensive).

- Online papers by many contemporary philosophers: http://phonline.org/index.php
  and http://www.ssrn.com/ (the social science reprint network, but has philosophy papers too)

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://plato.stanford.edu/

- The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://www.iep.utm.edu/

- An extensive site for philosophy related searching: http://www.epistemelinks.com/

- Electronic text sources:
  (a) http://sunsite.informatik.rwth-aachen.de/phil/sites/etext-prov.html
  (b) http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/asp/e-texts.asp
  (c) http://humanities.uchicago.edu/orgs/ARTFL/
  (data base for many Enlightenment texts in French)

- A helpful search engine for philosophy texts, events, etc.: http://noesis.evansville.edu/bin/index.cgi

- A helpful site for checking philosophy journals: http://users.ox.ac.uk/~worc0337/phil_journals.html

- Perseus Digital Library: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/

- Journal of the International Plato Society: http://www.nd.edu/~plato/

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