

Honors University Seminar for Engineering Students: Literature and Contradiction

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Great Questions

Among the many great questions that will engage us this semester are the following:

What is the value of studying literature?

What questions, categories, and vocabulary will help us better understand and enjoy literature?

What makes an artwork great?

What are contradictions and what kinds of contradictions exist?

Do contradictions exist in all realms of life?

Why are contradictions so interesting? And how might the act of identifying and working through contradictions be beneficial?

In what ways does an awareness of contradictions help us understand art and literature?

How might an awareness of contradictions help us comprehend the world, others, ourselves?

How might the capacity to grasp and resolve hidden contradictions make us more attentive, more self-conscious, more effective?

The works we explore should also open a window onto other great questions, for example:

What is our descriptive and normative understanding of humanity?

What is the essence of human dignity?

What various kinds of rationality exist?

What is justice?

Why is evil so fascinating to us and also so difficult to combat?

Why and in what ways does the study of tragedy and comedy matter? What can we learn from the tragic and the comic?

What is the role of the ugly in expanding our sense of aesthetic value?

What is the role of deception and self-deception in life?

What triggers identity crises and how does one best deal with them?

What are the distinguishing characteristics of the modern era? What are its greatest strengths and weaknesses?

What constitutes a revolution in culture?

Course Description

Recognizing contradictions is an essential part of a liberal education. It fosters critical thinking, helping us uncover truth by rejecting internally contradictory positions, and it offers an avenue for the most cogent form of criticism, immanent critique, that is, refuting a position by pointing out internal contradictions instead of simply approaching a disagreement with alternative

presuppositions. Further, recognizing contradictions aids our analysis of reality and our potential for advancement (both personal and historical) by allowing us to perceive, and then reduce, the gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be.

An awareness of contradictions also offers us a promising lens in approaching artworks, including literature. Contradictions are abundant in literary works insofar as they uncover hidden truths, convey insights indirectly, and embody moments of discord and harmony. Contradictions are central across a variety of genres and literary forms, from tragedy and the philosophical dialogue to comedy, satire, and jokes. Literature and art can also challenge and even contradict previous aesthetic models, thus altering our genre expectations.

Besides a small number of theoretical works, we will study one of Plato's philosophical dialogues, some passages from the New Testament, a range of literary works in a variety of genres, and some paintings and films. The works stem from multiple traditions (primarily Greek and German but also Roman, French, British, and American); all works will be available in English.

The main goal will be to help you appreciate and learn to interpret great artworks, especially literary works, and in the process help you develop an array of intellectual capacities. Among your learning goals will be to become skilled in identifying and working through contradictions; appreciate engagement with literary works as part of a life-long process of continual learning; develop more refined hermeneutic capabilities; and advance your capacities for articulate precision.

Principles of Student Learning

The course will be organized in accordance with several common-sense pedagogical principles, most of which were embodied already by Socrates and which have been given empirical verification in our age:

- *Active Learning:* Students are not passive minds into whose heads content is to be poured. Students learn by becoming involved, asking questions, engaging in discussions, solving problems, writing papers, in short, by energetically devoting themselves to the learning process. Educators speak of active or student-centered learning. Students learn most effectively when they are actively engaged, not simply listening or absorbing material. In fact simply taking an exam, even when you perform poorly, helps you to learn the material. Accordingly, this course will be student-centered, with considerable focus on student-student discussion, written contributions to a peer sounding board, paper topics chosen by students, and one-on-one oral examinations.
- *Peer Learning:* Students learn greatly from their peers. You are influenced by the people with whom you spend your time, for good or for ill. Who among your friends awakens your most noble intellectual passions and helps you become a better interlocutor and person? The research shows that the student's peer group is the single greatest source of influence on cognitive and affective development in college. We will enjoy many student-

student discussions in which the teacher simply plays a guiding role. You are encouraged to discuss our various texts and questions with one another and with others beyond the classroom.

- *Diversity:* Another learning principle is diversity. When you discover that your roommate is Muslim, you suddenly become more curious about Islam. That is not especially likely at Notre Dame, so we need to cultivate intellectual diversity, engaging works from other cultures and in languages other than English, even if our access to them in this particular class is via translation. We want to hear different perspectives from one another, even the most unusual, since thinking outside of the box can help us see more clearly. Do not be shy about asking off-the-wall questions or making unusual comments. All such contributions can be useful, as the process of discovering truth involves listening to various perspectives. In addition, many of the works we will study introduce us to radically different world-views from our own, but precisely in their difference, they may provide interesting antidotes to some of the cliches of the present.
- *Existential Engagement:* A further important learning principle is that students learn more when they are existentially engaged in the subject, when they care about the questions under discussion and recognize their significance. If you volunteer in a soup kitchen, your course on the economics of poverty takes on a different meaning. If you spend a year in Berlin, German history and politics become far more important to you. To that end and because of its intrinsic value, we will read these works not only to understand them in their own context, as interesting as that is, but also to ask to what extent they speak to us today. Can we learn not only *about* these works, but also *from* these works? That means relating these works to your past experiences, your daily lives, and your future aspirations, without falling into a purely subjective interpretation of the meaning.
- *High Expectations and Feedback:* Another basic learning principle is that students learn the most when their teachers have high academic expectations of them and when students receive helpful feedback that supports them in their quest to meet those high expectations. To know what you don't know is to help focus your learning. You can be sure that if the coach of an athletic team is nonchalant about physical fitness, discipline, timing, teamwork, and the like, the team will not win many games. So, too, an easy A will not help you in the long run, as you interview for highly competitive postgraduate fellowships, positions at the best graduate schools, or with the leading firms. The best way to learn is to shoot high and to recognize what might still be needed to meet your highest aspirations. Detailed feedback and discriminating grades are ways of pointing out strengths and weaknesses to students, challenging them to stretch, so that they are not lulled into thinking that their current capacities cannot be improved, and they needn't learn more.
- *Faculty-Student Contact.* The greatest predictor of student satisfaction with college is frequent interaction with faculty members. Students are more motivated, more committed, and more involved and seem to learn more when they have a connection to faculty members. So take advantage of opportunities to connect with your teachers. Drop

in during my office hours (come when you have a need or a question or simply when you would like to chat). Take advantage as well of other opportunities we will find for informal conversations.

- *Time on Task and Quality of Task:* Recent literature has suggested that students who major in disciplines that are less demanding of students' time tend to make fewer cognitive gains in college. Everyone who wants to learn a complex and demanding subject must make a substantial effort. Learning occurs not only during class time. It derives also from the investment you make in learning, the quality of the time you spend reading, thinking, writing, and speaking with others outside of class. For this three-credit honors seminar you will want to spend more than six hours per week preparing. An advantage you have in this course is that the works are challenging and fun at one and the same time, so it can be work and pleasure simultaneously.
- *Self-Reflection:* Students learn more when they are aware of how they best learn (so that they can focus their energies), what they most lack, and how to learn more. How can I become a better student? How can I learn to guide myself? We may occasionally have meta-discussions in which we reflect on our discussion at a higher level. Around what central interpretive question did the debate we were just having revolve? Why did we relinquish one interpretation and adopt another? How would we describe the evidence that spoke for and against the various positions? Why was today's discussion particularly successful or less successful? What is helping us to learn? The latter question underscores why I have just placed these principles before you.

Learning Goals

1) Engagement with Great Works and Great Questions: Students will gain insight into a selection of great works, both ancient and modern. Students will grow in their appreciation of the value of reading great works and asking great questions as part of a life-long process of continual learning. In so doing, they will cultivate their enjoyment of the life of the mind, building resources for the continued development of their inner world, and they will learn to value complexity and ambiguity. In relating to these works and questions in a personal way, they will also recognize a strong relationship between their academic work and personal lives.

2) Cultural Literacy: Students will become familiar with a selection of influential literary and cultural works. This will enhance their intellectual resources and help them to become more adept in their encounters with other persons, who might take knowledge of various authors and works for granted. That is, students will increase their exposure to the kinds of works one says that every educated person should have encountered and which have been part of most well-educated persons' repertoire across the ages. Besides engaging works, students will gain an enhanced set of categories and related vocabulary to understand, analyze, and interpret literary as well as other cultural works.

3) Hermeneutic Capacities: Students will improve their skills in interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating literary and cultural works. They will continue to develop their capacity to ask

pertinent and interesting questions and, applying the value of prolepsis, to argue for and against various interpretations. They will recognize the extent to which the parts and wholes of great works relate to one another.

4) **Formal Skills:** Students will advance in their articulate and precise mastery of the English language, both spoken and written, and they will improve their basic communication skills insofar as they accompany the organization and communication of their thoughts. Students will improve their capacities to formulate clear questions, to listen carefully and attentively, to explore ideas through dialogue, to argue for and against differing positions, and express their thoughts eloquently and persuasively.

5) **Intellectual Virtues:** In developing their capacities for processing difficult materials, engaging in empathetic and thoughtful listening, and developing their own ideas in engagement with others, students will develop various intellectual virtues essential to a flourishing community of learning--virtues such as temperance, modesty, justice, intellectual hospitality, diplomacy, courage, honesty, perseverance, patience, curiosity, and wonder.

6) **Awareness of Contradictions:** Students will become more attentive to recognizing and working through contradictions, which is essential to a liberal education and the development of critical thinking. An awareness of contradictions also makes us more sensitive to the structures of artworks, more conscious of the dynamics of history, and better able to grasp the gaps between the world as it is and as it should be. Through this process of identifying and working through contradictions, students will furthermore develop a more sympathetic understanding of identity crises in themselves and others and a richer awareness of complexity.

Student Contributions to Learning and Assessment Guidelines

1) Class Contribution: 15%;

Students will be expected to contribute regularly to discussion and to adopt various informal facilitative roles during the semester. Class contribution is not equivalent with the quantity of class participation; instead both quantity and quality will be considered. Because student learning is aided by active student participation in the classroom, students will want to prepare well and contribute regularly and meaningfully to discussions.

2) Regular Assignments: 15%;

In advance of every class, you will submit an entry, observation, analytical point, or question, to our online discussion group (via Sakai). These need not be especially long. A few sentences or a paragraph will be fine. You might respond to a study question, comment on a particular passage that you find crucial, address a formal or literary element, discuss an observation already made by another student, relate a relevant personal experience, or ask a question or set of questions that would be productive for the Sakai discussion or our classroom discussion. (Asking good questions is a very important skill.) All responses must be submitted by 12 hours before class

time, so Monday evenings by 9:30 and Wednesday evenings by 9:30. If you do not post by the deadline but do post before class, you must, if you wish to receive any credit at all, send your post not only to Sakai but also to my e-mail. It is unlikely that I will check Sakai after the deadline.

Along with your entries to the group discussion, you may be asked to submit a small number of written assignments directly to me.

3) Papers: 55%.

In addition to your informal writing, you will submit three formal papers, each of approximately 5-7 pages (papers may not exceed 10 pages). The due dates are September 26, November 7, and December 12; these are listed again on the calendar below. The first two papers are due as print-outs at class time; the final paper is to be submitted electronically by midnight on December 12. My e-mail is mroche@nd.edu.

Students are free to choose their topics within the context of the course and its readings. The paper should indicate both breadth and depth, for example, paying attention to the whole of an artwork but also telling the reader something intriguing and insightful. Creative topics and strategies are welcome. Students should not hesitate to think out loud with me about various options before settling on a topic. Starting early is a wise strategy.

Each paper should have a title and pagination. You will want to use MLA style <<http://www.mla.org/style>>. (MLA stands for the Modern Language Association.) This style is widespread in the humanities and relatively simple and user-friendly. The library has reference materials that spell out MLA style, such as the *MLA Handbook* or the *MLA Style Manual*, and there are short versions available on the Web. I have a few copies students may borrow upon request.

All papers should be Times New Roman or a similar standard font, 12 point, and double spaced.

The first paper is to be rewritten after you receive my comments and then resubmitted within one week of its return to you. Rewriting is an excellent strategy to improve your capacity for writing. You will have one week to submit these rewrites after the papers are returned.

Because this is a University Seminar, the dominant weight for this course (55%) is oriented toward your formal writing. The first paper will count 15%, and each of the subsequent papers will count 20%.

A rewrite of the second paper will be optional or obligatory depending on my comments; in a few cases I will specifically request a rewrite. The notation could originate from some basic mistakes on which I would like you to work further, or it could stem from a missed opportunity, which I believe you should address as part of your learning experience in this course. In the unlikely event that you do not submit an obligatory rewrite, then your grade for the paper will be dropped by one partial grade, for example, from a B to a B-.

The third paper will stand as is. For that paper you will submit only one version.

Late submissions of all papers will be downgraded a partial grade, with a further drop of a partial grade for each day that passes beyond the due date.

4) Oral Examination: 15%

Each student will also have a one-on-one final oral examination of approximately twenty minutes, during which questions specific to the works discussed in class as well as related questions of a broader interest will be engaged. The questions will be oriented to the works and to the learning goals above. Because each examination will be individualized, it should be an excellent opportunity for you to develop your ideas in conversation and for me to assess your learning. Final oral examinations will be scheduled between Friday, December 6, and Friday, December 20. Everyone seeking an examination slot before the scheduled time for our examination, Friday, December 20, 10:30 to 12:30, will receive one.

The goals of each assignment and of all evaluation are to improve understanding and performance. For more detailed comments on these assignments and on assessment guidelines, see below.

Logistical Information

Class: Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9:30 to 10:45; Coleman Morse Center 243.

Office: 349 Decio Hall.

Office Hours: Mondays from 2:00 to 3:15; Thursdays from 11:00 to 12:15; after class both Tuesdays and Thursdays; and by appointment (since I am teaching Monday through Friday this semester, appointments should not be difficult to arrange, especially with advance notice).

Phone: (574) 631-8142 (office); (574) 302-1813 (cell).

E-mail: mroche@nd.edu; **Web:** <http://mroche.nd.edu/>

Essential Reading

Required (in sequence)

- Sophocles, *Theban Plays*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin, 2000. 978-0140444254.
- Plato, *Euthyphro* (Oxford World Classics) 0199540500.
- Schiller, *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*. 1795-96. *Essays*. Ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. New York: Continuum, 2005: 179-260 (to be supplied by instructor).

- Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires* (Penguin Classics) 978-0140447040.
- Auerbach, *Mimesis*. 1946. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953: 40-49 (to be supplied by instructor).
- Selected passages from the Bible (you may use your own copy, a library copy, or a version on the Web).
- Augustine, *Sermon 27* (to be supplied by instructor).
- Molière, *Tartuffe* and *The Misanthrope*, trans. Richard Wilbur (Mariner) 978-0156605175.
- Höslé, Vittorio. “Crises of Identity: Individual and Collective.” *Objective Idealism, Ethics, and Politics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998: 83-100 (to be supplied by instructor).
- Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Penguin) 978-0141439570.
- Brecht, *The Good Person of Szechwan* (Penguin Classics) 978-01431053741.
- Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*. Ed. John Willett. New York: Hill, 1964: 22-23, 37 (to be supplied by instructor).
- Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (Norton, The Standard Edition) 978-0393001457.

The works above along with three films and several sets of paintings will form our core material for discussions.

I assume that many of you have read in high school an excellent basic style manual. Arguably, the best such basic manual is William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White’s *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. New York: Longman, 1999. 978-0205313426. This short work is to be read by the submission of your first paper. I ordered it for the book store, but you may already own it, and you can also find multiple copies in the Library, including one on reserve.

Recommended for Writing

A more advanced style manual for already good writers is Claire Kehrwald Cook’s *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing*. New York: Houghton, 1985. 978-0395393918. Although I have not required this work, you would do well to purchase and read this volume as well, ideally by the time you submit your first revision or before the submission of your second paper. It is a superb manual for those who want to write at a very high level of clarity, precision, and elegance. I have also placed a copy on reserve in the Library.

Recommended for a Flourishing College Experience

I also want to recommend to you two additional books that may enhance your Notre Dame experience: Richard J. Light’s *Making the Most of College*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001; and Ken Bain’s *What the Best College Students Do*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012. Both works offer best practices culled from interviews with successful college students. Both books have been placed on reserve.

Background Materials

The course will focus on primary works. Before spending too much time on secondary literature, students might consider rereading the texts in question or exploring additional works by the various authors. However, students often benefit from an introductory or contextual orientation. This is especially valuable in an environment where almost all of class time is devoted to discussion as opposed to lecture. Fortunately, almost all of our works have introductions with basic background information. You may also wish to consult materials in the reference area of the library.

If you would like to review secondary works, there are three options: recommended reading is listed in many of our works; a library search will bring you other works; and you should feel free to ask me for recommendations.

Sakai

Some course materials will be placed on Sakai, and you will use the “Forum” function to engage in reading and posting comments before each discussion.

All three of the films we will be viewing are currently in the process of being placed on Sakai. You will find the films under “Streaming Video.” From there, you can click on the film title. Once you click the title and accept the terms, the video will play in your web browser. You need to ensure that you have the Quicktime Video plugin installed. OIT recommends that you use Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox to ensure compatibility. In the unlikely event that you have issues with streaming videos, you can always use a computer in one of the labs on campus.

Two other options for viewing exist. I have bought two copies of each DVD. I can hand them out in class, and you can view them at times you can agree upon among yourselves. Or we can set a time late one afternoon or evening and reserve a campus room for watching each film on a larger screen. Let me know your preferences. The dorm option is probably most conducive to informal post-film discussion. Students in previous semesters have been drawn to this option and have enjoyed the collective screenings, in some cases multiple viewing sessions with different groups of students.

Calendar of Classes and Readings

Please note that I have built in a swing day and a day for a final discussion. In essence, these give us the option to spend more time with a given work or to delay a discussion so that we can devote an entire session or two half-sessions to writing. Obviously when and if we pursue such a strategy, the calendar will be affected, pushing back subsequent sessions accordingly.

If it turns out that devoting class time to writing becomes superfluous, we can contemplate adding a work that might be of special interest to engineering students, a complex and rich frame narrative (of 100 pages) by the German author Theodor Storm called *The White Horse Rider*. If we pursue this strategy, I will provide the copies, and students will be free to drop one work from the oral examination and to replace it with this narrative.

Any adjustments in the calendar will not affect the due date for papers.

August 27, 2013	Orientation and Introduction
August 29, 2013	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i> (ca. 70 pages, though fewer words per page)
September, 3, 2013	Sophocles, <i>Oedipus the King</i> (ca. 93 pages, though fewer words per page)
September 5, 2013	Sophocles, <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> (ca. 106 pages, though fewer words per page)
September 10, 2013	Roland Joffé, <i>The Mission</i> (125 minutes)
September 12, 2013	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (22 pages)
September 17, 2013	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (reread 22 pages)
September 19, 2013	Schiller 179-226 (47 pages)
September 24, 2013	Schiller 226-60 (34 pages)
September 26, 2013	Juvenal 3-70 (63 pages) First Paper Due.
October 1, 2013	Juvenal 71-122 (51 pages)
October 3, 2013	Selected artworks by Käthe Kollwitz, Otto Dix, and George Grosz
October 8, 2013	Mt. 25:31-27:50; Mk. 10:17-10:34 and 14:26-14:72; Lk. 15:1-15:2; Jn. 19:1-19:37; 1 Cor. 1:10-1:31; 2. Cor. 12:1-13:14; excerpt from Auerbach's <i>Mimesis</i> (provided by instructor); Augustine, 27 th sermon (provided by instructor); selected artworks by Matthias Grünewald and Michelangelo Caravaggio (provided by instructor)
October 10, 2013	Hösle (17 pages)
October 15, 2013	Molière, <i>The Misanthrope</i> (ca. 135 pages, though fewer words per page)
October 17, 2013	Molière, <i>Tartuffe</i> (ca. 150 pages, though fewer words per page)
October 22, 2013	Fall Break (no class)
October 24, 2013	Fall Break (no class)
October 29, 2013	Wilde, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> , 3-78 (75 pages)

- October 31, 2013 Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 79-147 (68 pages)
- November 5, 2013 Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 148-213 (65 pages)
- November 7, 2013 Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, *Das Leben der Anderen* [*The Lives of Others*] (2006) / 132 minutes **Second Paper Due.**
- November 12, 2013 Brecht 1-63 (63 pages) and a brief hand-out from his writings on theater (3 pages)
- November 14, 2013 Brecht 64-115 (51 pages)
- November 19, 2013 Freud 5-81 (76 pages)
- November 21, 2013 Freud 81-139 (58 pages)
- November 26, 2013 Freud 143-223 (80 pages)
- November 28, 2013 Thanksgiving (no class)
- December 3, 2013 Freud 224-293 (69 pages)
- December 5, 2013 Clint Eastwood, *Gran Torino* (116 minutes)
- December 10, 2013 Swing Day (I have built in one swing day which will allow us to spend more time with one of the works above or focus more time on writing.)
- December 12, 2013 Final Discussion (Our final discussion could also be converted to a swing day.) **Third Paper Due.**

Policy on Attendance

You should attend every class. Up to two unexcused absences will be integrated into the class contribution grade. Three unexcused absences will lead to the reduction of the final grade by one partial unit, for example, from a B to a B-. Four unexcused absences will lead to the reduction of the final grade by two partial units. Five or more unexcused absences will lead to failure of the course. Excused absences, with written documentation from a rector, a doctor, or the Office of Undergraduate Studies, will not affect your grade in any way.

In the unlikely event that a student misses a scheduled oral examination without having a legitimate excuse, a make-up examination will be arranged, but the student's oral examination grade will be dropped by one partial unit.

Grading

Criteria for Grading Oral Performance

Criteria for a Grade of B

The student ...

prepares well for each class by completing all assignments; rereading or reviewing, when appropriate; making appropriate notes; and discussing the works outside the class with students from the class and students and others not from the class;

does not miss classes for any unexcused reasons and comes to each class on time;

makes contributions that show thorough familiarity with the assigned material and thoughtful reflection on it;

asks good, searching questions that spark discussion;

listens well and exhibits by facial expressions and body posture the active art of listening;

participates in the give-and-take of discussion, for example, by asking clarifying questions of other students, offering evidence to support positions, or proposing alternative perspectives;

is willing to engage an issue from multiple points of view;

is able to make connections across the works of the semester;

can draw interesting comparisons;

is willing to integrate real-world observation and personal experience as well as scholarly information, including relevant introductions;

can recognize strengths and weaknesses in an argument;

demonstrates the capacity to think on his or her feet;

is willing to think through an idea even when it is in the end abandoned;

is willing to recognize, investigate, and, where appropriate, question his or her own assumptions and accepted ideas and develop alternative positions;

shows the humility to withdraw an idea from discussion in the face of decisive counter-arguments;

exhibits the confidence to retain a position when counter-arguments fail;

speaks with clarity and engagement;

is able to marshal evidence in favor of a position;

helps the group explore one aspect thoroughly, but then can also move on to the next topic when appropriate;

is more interested in the group dynamic of truth seeking through dialogue than in demonstrating his or her own excellence;

exhibits respect, tact, and diplomacy in debate with others.

Criteria for a Grade of A

The student does all of the above and ...

ensures that the group discussion flourishes at the most demanding, and yet also most enjoyable level, helps the entire group find the balance between being alert and being relaxed;

finds and develops meaningful threads, so that the discussion, instead of being haphazard, reaches previously unexplored heights;
exhibits intellectual hospitality and generosity of spirit, effectively encouraging the participation of others and successfully drawing good ideas out of others;
gives unusually deep and rich responses to interpretive and searching questions;
consistently links the discussion to earlier works and themes as well as issues of existential interest;
helps guide the discussion through occasional summaries and substantial, thoughtful queries that build on earlier comments;
keeps the discussion on track while also encouraging creative leaps and risk-taking, including the development of new insights and perspectives;
asks fascinating and unexpected questions;
exhibits substantial curiosity and creativity and a love of the life of the mind;
brings forth sparkling and deep insights without dominating the discussion;
exhibits a searching mind, the mind of a developing intellectual;
uses increasingly eloquent and elegant language.

Criteria for a Grade of C

The student ...

comes prepared to class;
occasionally contributes isolated, but thoughtful comments to the discussion;
makes comments that are backed with evidence;
discerns the difference between more relevant and less relevant comments;
understands his or her own assumptions and is willing to question them;
exhibits respect for others and treats all persons with dignity;
seeks truth through dialogue.

Criteria for a Grade of D

The student ...

comes to class, but rarely contributes to the discussion;
makes comments that are without evidence;
makes irrelevant comments and has difficulties contributing to the flow of the conversation;
has little, if any, awareness of his or her biases, prejudices, and assumptions.

Criteria for a Grade of F

The student ...

does not speak at all or makes comments that exhibit a lack of preparation;
disturbs, rather than enhances, the conversation with irrelevant patter;
has no awareness of his or her biases, prejudices, and assumptions;

exhibits little or no respect for the class and its search for truth.

Criteria for Grading Sakai Contributions

Criteria for a Grade of B

The student ...

contributes in advance of every class session and before the deadline;
makes contributions that show thorough familiarity with the assigned material and thoughtful reflection on it;
makes insightful observations on the works;
participates in the give-and-take of discussion, for example, by asking clarifying questions of other students, offering evidence to support positions, proposing alternative perspectives, or inaugurating new trains of thought;
is willing to engage an issue from multiple points of view;
is able to make connections across the works of the semester;
asks good, searching questions and draws interesting comparisons;
is willing to integrate real-world observation and personal experience as well as scholarly information, including relevant introductions;
can recognize strengths and weaknesses in an argument;
is able to marshal evidence in favor of a position;
writes with engagement as well as in a language that is understandable to peers and without grammatical and stylistic errors;
exhibits respect, tact, and diplomacy in debate with others.

Criteria for a Grade of A

The student does all of the above and ...

develops and initiates meaningful threads, so that the discussion, instead of being haphazard, reaches previously unexplored heights;
offers unusually rich and intelligent observations;
consistently links the discussion to earlier works and themes as well as issues of existential interest;
asks fascinating and unexpected questions;
exhibits a searching mind, the mind of a developing intellectual;
uses increasingly clear, precise, and elegant language.

Criteria for a Grade of C

The student ...

contributes regularly and conscientiously, but for the most part offers brief or pedestrian observations;

exhibits respect for others and treats all persons with dignity.

Criteria for a Grade of D

The student ...

contributes most of the time but still misses a number of sessions;
exhibits some knowledge of the material;
makes comments for which evidence is modest or lacking;
makes uninformed, irrelevant, or contradictory comments;
has only slight awareness of his or her biases, prejudices, and assumptions.

Criteria for a Grade of F

The student ...

frequently fails to contribute to the discussions;
contributes comments that show a lack of knowledge of the material;
makes observations that are clearly recognizable as unhelpful;
has no awareness of his or her biases, prejudices, and assumptions;
exhibits little or no respect for the class and its search for truth.

Criteria for Grading Papers

Criteria for a Grade of B

Clarity

The paper presents a clear thesis, and the arguments are accessible to the reader.

Complexity

Though clear, the thesis is also complex and challenging, not simplistic. Multiple points of view are engaged, and the limits of one's own interpretation are acknowledged, either through the avoidance of overreaching or through the refutation of alternative arguments. The essay integrates a variety of connected themes and exhibits a curious mind at work.

Structure

The title is effective. The introduction is inviting and compelling, appropriate and succinct. The essay is structured logically and coherently. The overall outline or organization makes sense, and the paragraphs flow appropriately, one to the other. The conclusion is powerful.

Evidence

Appropriate evidence is given for the paper's claims, for example, a chain of abstract arguments or evidence from the work being interpreted.

Style

The essay is on the whole well-written, the language is well-chosen, and the paper reads smoothly. There is an appropriate variety and maturity of sentence structure. The writer avoids grammatical errors, awkward or wordy stylistic constructions, and spelling and proofreading errors. Bibliographical and other information is presented in an appropriate style.

Independence

The paper does not simply restate the obvious or repeat what others have said, but builds on what is known to exhibit the student's own thinking about the topic. The writer avoids simply repeating plot structures or paraphrasing the ideas of others. The student exhibits some level of independence and a new perspective.

Criteria for a Grade of A

The paper integrates the expectations of a B grade, but is in addition unusually thoughtful, deep, and far-reaching in its analysis and evidence. The paper is ambitious, creative, and engaging. The language is elegant.

Criteria for a Grade of C

The thesis of the paper is clear, and the paper takes a stand on a complex issue. The writer exhibits some competence in exploring the subject but neglects to integrate alternative perspectives. Most of the essay is well-organized, and the logic is for the most part clear and coherent. Some evidence is given for the points made in the essay. The argument is sustained but not imaginative or complex. The language is pedestrian, but nonetheless understandable and free of extraneous material. The paper is without basic grammatical errors. The paper has a derivative quality to it. The writer barely goes beyond paraphrase. While some of the criteria for a B grade may have been fulfilled, a majority has not.

Criteria for a Grade of D

The thesis of the paper is missing, unclear, or overly simple. The paper includes some arguments, but counter-arguments are not considered in any serious way or are misconstrued. The essay's structure is not readily apparent. Ideas are present but are not developed with details or examples. Paragraphs are poorly constructed and contain little supporting detail. Problems in grammar, spelling, or punctuation interfere with the writer's capacity to communicate. The writer tends toward paraphrase.

Criteria for a Grade of F

The assignment is not completed or is completed in a format that is clearly substandard. The essay exhibits little, if any, preparatory reflection or study. It contains no serious ideas and lacks an argument as well as supporting evidence. The essay is difficult to read or comprehend. No meaningful structure is discernible. Sentences are poorly written and riddled with grammatical mistakes.

Criteria for Grading Oral Examinations

Criteria for a Grade of B

The student knows the works and is able to handle most questions, including questions that ask for analysis, comparison, and evaluation. The student exhibits the ability to handle unexpected and unpredictable questions. The student is able to link the meaning of the works to his or her own personal perspectives. The student is articulate and forthcoming in his or her responses and exhibits the ability to develop nuanced and detailed perspectives. The student avoids filler words.

Criteria for a Grade of A

The student satisfies the expectations for a B grade. In addition, the student offers responses that are unusually thoughtful, deep, creative, and far-reaching in their analysis. The student speaks with eloquence and responds to even the most complex questions with nuance and sophistication.

Criteria for a Grade of C

The student is able to handle most questions, offering basic analyses, comparisons, and evaluations. The responses, while accurate, tend not to be as full as would be desirable. A few of the more difficult questions present difficulties. Filler words occasionally interfere with the responses.

Criteria for a Grade of D

The student handles some questions well, but struggles with others. The student tends to do well with simple informational questions, but struggles when analysis, comparison, and evaluation are involved. Filler words are common.

Criteria for a Grade of F

The student exhibits responses that manifest a lack of preparation or knowledge. In some cases, the student cannot answer questions in even a rudimentary way.

Grading System of the University of Notre Dame

See <http://registrar.nd.edu/gradingsystems.pdf>

Letter Grade	Point Value	Description	Explanatory Comments
A	4	Truly Exceptional	Work meets or exceeds the highest expectations for the course.
A-	3.667	Outstanding	Superior work in all areas of the course.
B+	3.333	Very Good	Superior work in most areas of the course.
B	3.000	Good	Solid work across the board.
B-	2.667	More than Acceptable	More than acceptable, but falls short of solid work.
C+	2.333	Acceptable: Meets All Basic Standards	Work meets all the basic requirements and standards for the course.
C	2.000	Acceptable: Meets Most Basic Standards	Work meets most of the basic requirements and standards in several areas.
C-	1.667	Acceptable: Meets Some Basic Standards	While acceptable, work falls short of meeting basic standards in several areas.
D	1.000	Minimally Passing	Work just over the threshold of acceptability.
F	0	Failure	Unacceptable performance.

Academic Code of Honor

This course will be conducted in accordance with Notre Dame’s *Academic Code of Honor*, which stipulates: “As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty ... The pledge to uphold the *Academic Code of Honor* includes an understanding that a student’s submitted work, graded or ungraded – examinations, draft copies, papers, homework assignments, extra credit work, etc. – must be his or her own.” The code is available at <http://honorcode.nd.edu/>. Information on citing sources and avoiding plagiarism is available at <http://library.nd.edu/help/plagiarism.shtml>.

Students are encouraged to discuss readings and films with one another outside of class and should feel free to discuss assignments with one another, but the source of all ideas must be revealed fully and honestly. Whenever information or insights are obtained from secondary works, students should cite their sources.

Appendix I: Leading a Discussion

You will be asked to lead one or more discussions together with a classmate. Normally the two of you will lead the discussion for the entire class. A standard situation would be that I interject only a few comments or questions here and there. I am likely to be much quieter than when I lead

the discussion. However, I do reserve the right, which is also an obligation, to help steer the discussion or offer comments when it would be advantageous for all.

You will want to keep in mind that a good discussion is determined by at least three factors: your pre-class preparation; your attentiveness and dexterity during the discussion; and the activity of the participants themselves, including their advance preparation and active contributions.

Study Questions

Preparing a few pre-reading or study questions to help students focus their reflections is almost always useful. If you intend to offer study questions, please keep the following in mind. If you will be leading a Tuesday discussion, you should post or send questions by Monday evening at 7:00, preferably earlier. If you will be leading a Thursday discussion, you should post or send questions by Wednesday evening at 7:00, preferably earlier. You can post on Sakai, you can send an e-mail, or you can distribute a hand-out. In addition to study questions, you should feel free to provide, where helpful, brief background information.

Discussion Format

You could base the discussion on your study questions, the Sakai contributions, or both. If you prepare study questions, they can substitute for your Sakai contribution. However, you may also want to engage the other students before class via Sakai. In either case, your tasks will be to ask questions of the group; get them speaking, ideally to one another and not only through you; probe with appropriate follow-up questions or offer appropriate synthetic reflections; and help move the discussion forward.

However, multiple other strategies are possible.

You may wish to break the class into small groups for intensive discussion before opening the conversation to the wider group. These could be groups of two, three, four or even larger. Small groups allow everyone to speak and also sharpen the contributions of students. If you have small groups, you can weigh whether the groups should address the same or different questions. At times you may wish to base the groups on students' Sakai contributions.

You may wish to consider orchestrating a debate. In such a case, your study questions should help students prepare for the debate. You may want to structure the debate so that if, say, two questions are debated, one group defends the author or work on one question and criticizes the author or work on a different question. Debates can also be more interpretive than evaluative.

One of you might lead the discussion, and the other might play a special role, such as devil's advocate (the partner listens carefully for any emerging consensus and then formulates and expresses a contrary view the group needs to counter, or the person listens carefully to challenge the group on its hidden assumptions, which need to be defended).

You could form a panel of two who present their ideas for about five to seven minutes each, followed by questions to the panelists, and then a wider discussion.

You could consider some role-playing, in which you play a character or an author, and students must develop questions for you.

Please don't hesitate to draw on your creativity in trying to craft a meaningful format.

Some Tips

Unless you are building from basic to more complex questions, you will want to formulate open-ended questions that encourage perception and analysis, not questions that lead to a one-word response or a simple right or wrong answer. However, a simple query of the whole class (for example, does the work define holiness?) could easily lead to meaningful follow-up questions.

Speak clearly and loudly.

Keep your eyes open for volunteers who would like to speak.

Be willing to wait for a response. Give your colleagues time to think.

Call on colleagues by their names.

Don't hesitate to use the blackboard.

Show through your body language that you are listening and that you do not intend to speak until the person is finished speaking. Encourage speakers through your body language, such as, when relevant, by nodding in agreement.

If many persons want to speak, be alert to hands that are raised and the order in which they have been raised as well as the amount of speaking individual students have done thus far, both in your individual class and during the semester. You are free to move some persons forward on your list. Do not hesitate to say at a given point that now the floor is open only to those who have not yet spoken.

Try to build on the comments of students, or have other students build on the comments of others. Make comments, for example, that underscore links between two contributions. Make summary observations that take into account several contributions and touch on a recurring theme in the discussion. One of your goals is to try to create a coherent discussion instead of isolated comments that simply follow one another without an organic connection.

One way to prepare is to anticipate in advance at least some of the comments that you might expect to hear. Come to class with a bag of ideas and dip into the bag, as needed, depending on what kinds of responses you receive. You will also need to come to class that day in an alert mode, as much of what you will need to do is think on your feet.

Try to get different views on the table and try to delve into supporting arguments, including specific references to the work in question. Often a discussion is enhanced by references to the work.

If a student, you or another, wishes to read a passage from the work, make sure that the passage has been appropriately identified, with pagination and location, before the student begins reading, so that everyone has located the relevant passage.

Ask follow-up questions: To seek clarification, ask: What exactly do you mean when you say ... ? To push for supporting evidence, ask: Why do you think that is so? Where in the text do you find support for that view? Can anyone else find evidence for that view? To encourage connections, ask: How does what you just said relate to ... ? To encourage more complex analysis, ask: Are there any counter-arguments to this position?

In encouraging students to talk to one another and not direct all responses to you, you might ask, who wants to respond to that point?

Do not hesitate to call on classmates, especially if you can build on statements they made earlier (in the semester) or in their Sakai contribution.

Try to pay some attention to equitable distribution of workload. It is better if both of you, at least over time, actively lead the discussion instead of having one person defer constantly to the other.

Your questions need not be restricted to the texts themselves. You should feel free also, at times, to use the texts to develop overarching or existential reflections.

You might also review the “Criteria for Grading Oral Performance,” which have some implicit suggestions for what characterize good contributions and good discussions.

Consider strategies for closing the discussion. Do you want to summarize some major points? Do you want to connect what has been discussed with earlier issues? Do you want to link the day’s discussion with future topics yet to be explored?

If you would like me to look at your draft study questions, I would be happy to offer feedback. Also, if you want to discuss strategies for leading the discussion, feel free to contact me. Besides my office hours, I almost always have a few minutes before and after class.

Enjoy your time leading the discussion. You won’t have this learning opportunity in every class.

Appendix II: Symbols and Abbreviations for Papers

Content

- ✓ This sentence or insight is good.
- gd** This sentence or insight is good.
- ⊕ This sentence or insight is interesting and may be worth developing further.
- ! Fascinating or intriguing.
- ? Not at all clear.

Syntax

- wo** Word order is a problem.
- tr** Transpose word order.

Grammar and Style

- ~~~~ Poorly written. A variety of issues may be in play: a missing word, a lack of clarity, a lack of concision, a stylistically undesirable repetition of words, a sentence ending with a preposition, or simply an awkward expression.
- awk** Awkwardly written. Reformulate.
- [] Eliminate (also shown via a loop, as in the standard proofreading symbol for eliminate).
- = Capitalization not correct.
- dic** Diction.
- dm** Dangling modifier.
- gen** Try to use gender-neutral language.
- gr** Grammar problem.
- mod** Problem with indicative versus subjective.
- paral** Lack of parallelism.
- p** Punctuation problem.
- pp** Avoid strings of three or more prepositional phrases.
- rep** Repetition, in language or content, which should be avoided
- si** Split infinitive
- sg/pl** Singular / plural problem.
- sp** Spelling problem.

Varia

- ^ Something missing here.
- () Bring the words together or eliminate a space.
- # Insert a space.
- etc** etcetera (That is, there may be more such instances, but I did not mark all of them.)
- t** Is the tense correct?
- c** Is the case correct?