

Honors Program – Freshman Seminars – fall 2008

FSP 101:H1

Paradise Lost and Found – Prof. Graham

T/F 10-11:20

Four hundred years after his birth, is Milton still relevant? In this course we will read *Paradise Lost*, the magical story of a man named “Man” and a woman named “Mother of All” who live in the land of Delight--until an enemy named “Enemy” comes along. We will consider various imaginative responses to Milton (such as Pullman’s *The Golden Compass*), as well as scholarly responses (Milton: misogynist or feminist? politically radical or conservative?) The class will plan and carry out a birthday celebration, so keep Dec. 9 open! No prior ability to read early modern English is required.

FSP 111:H2

Mind, Morality and Free Will - Prof. Kamber

M/R 4-5:50

This seminar is a philosophical examination of humanity’s quest to understand what it means to be human. Morality, mind, and free will are three of the things commonly cited as distinctive marks of being human. Most human beings take for granted that there are some actions they ought to do and others they ought not to do; that they have a mental life characterized by intentionality, reason, and self-consciousness; that they have the capacity to make significant choices and are responsible for the choices they make. Yet few things are more difficult to understand than morality, mind, and free will. For over two thousand years, philosophers have struggled to explain their nature, causes, and limits. Some, like Socrates, have thought that “life without kind of examination is not worth living.” More recently, social, behavioral, and cognitive scientists have joined this ancient quest for self-knowledge. Our task in this seminar will be to examine and critique some of the most important insights and controversies that have emerged from their labors. To help round out our appreciation of the ways that human beings strive for self-knowledge, we will also consider issues of morality, mind, and free will as expressed or suggested by literary works and films. Thus, students will be asked to complement their command of standard methods for rationally evaluating philosophical arguments and scientific findings concerning these issues with an examination of artistic means for envisioning what the world or society would be like if particular views were true. Students will also be expected to develop and defend their own views.

FSP 111:H3

(Some) Great Books I - Prof. Sisko & Prof. D. Steinberg

T/F 2-3:50

Class work in this course consists of student-centered discussion of texts from the western classical tradition -- Greece and Rome. The seminar is team-led by a philosophy and a literature teacher, and we read, among others, Homer's *Iliad*, some Greek dramatists, Plato and Aristotle, Latin philosophy and natural science, and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Our emphasis is on learning how to read and understand any historical, philosophical, literary or scientific text. This course counts as an honors philosophy class; students are expected to enroll in HON 270: (Some) Great Books II in spring 2009; HON 270 will look at medieval and early modern texts, and will count as a 'literary, visual, or performing arts' Liberal Learning class. HON 270 serves, within the English major, as a course in Literary History.

FSP 111:H4**MENACE TO SOCIETY: THE CONDEMNATION OF PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN THE BERTRAND RUSSELL CASE - Prof. Preti**

MR 4-5:20

In 1940, City College appointed Bertrand Russell, the most famous living philosopher of the time (1872-1970), to the faculty. Controversy ensued when the Archdiocese of New York, in league with various politicians, managed successfully to oppose the appointment, on grounds that Russell's philosophical ideas were unsuitable and inappropriate, and that, as a result, his influence would be too dangerous to college students. The event bore striking similarities to the infamous condemnation (to death) of Socrates for impiety and corruption of the youth in 399 B.C. In this course we will carefully examine the content of Russell's ideas and debate their potential menace to society. Details of the lawsuit at the center of this particular event will be analyzed for what they can add to the understanding of the opposition to the Russell appointment. The focus of the course will be to generate debate and discussion on questions like: How do philosophical ideas pose a threat to society? What ideas in specific were considered to be the most threatening in the Russell case? What was the main focus of the opposition? What form did it take? Are there ways in which such conflict occurs continues to occur today? Should ideas be held to a unique standard of freedom no matter what their content, and should institutions protect that freedom? Students will be introduced to a series of core philosophical skills (such as reason, argument, and analysis) through study and discussion of the course materials, and will be expected to apply those skills in order to develop proficiency and clarity in written work and oral presentation.

FSP 121:H1**Protecting New Jersey's Pinelands - Prof. Koch**

M/R 12:30-1:50

The seminar will explore the unique features of the Pine Barrens area of South Jersey in terms of geology, history and biodiversity; the literature and art that depicts and celebrates the region; and the efforts to protect this area by the Pinelands Commission, other governmental agencies, groups like the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, and citizen activists. Special attention will also be paid to the economic impacts of these efforts and the tension between economic development and environmental preservation.

FSP 131:H1**The Beatles and their World - Prof. Ventura**

T/F 10-11:20

The lives and music of the Beatles reflect profound cultural changes that followed the Great Depression and World War II. The extraordinary transformation of this musical group from a locally popular Liverpool band to one of the most famous (and influential) groups of all time offers insight into our modern world. With the Beatles as its focus, this seminar will explore such topics in modern cultural history as race relations, women's rights and gender issues, youth culture, counterculture and protest, mass media and public relations, business practices in the music industry, and, of course, developments in popular music.

FSP 134:H1**What happened to Yugoslavia? - Prof. Paces**

R 2-5:20

In February 2008, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia, making it the 7th country to emerge from the ashes of the former Yugoslavia. During the Cold War, Yugoslavia was widely considered a model for diverse societies, with several ethnic and religious groups living side by side. But, by the 1990s, the country had erupted into civil wars and ethnic violence. Using fiction, memoirs, history and film, we will seek to understand how neighbors became enemies in the former Yugoslavia.