PHILOSOPHY OF MIDDLE-EARTH
HUMN/PHIL 3305 | Section V1D/P1D/21D | Online

Instructor: James Gifford  Email: gifford@fdu.edu
Phone: 1–604–648–4476  Skype: prof.gifford
Hours: Wed. 11:00–11:50  Office: 118

FDU-Vancouver

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF TRADITIONAL TERRITORY
FDU – Vancouver Campus acknowledges that the land on which we gather is the unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

COURSE CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION
The recent popularity of the film version of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* has renewed interest in this widely read work set in the realm of Middle-earth. A careful study of Tolkien’s work can be used to raise several philosophical questions, particularly in the area of ethics. This course will examine such questions, also considering topics from political philosophy, cosmology, and literary theory. Brief mention will be made of Tolkien’s colleague C.S. Lewis.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
HUMN/PHIL 3305 equips students for the critical exploration of ethics, epistemology, subjectivity, history, and theology. Through a series of essays and formal writing assignments, students will also improve their understanding of persuasive academic research and communication. By reading and responding critically to literary and philosophical texts, students will

- Proficiently use MLA Style in a research paper and have an awareness of other citation methods (APA, Chicago, etc.).
- Understand and respond critically to different kinds of research materials and distinguish reliable scholarly sources from less reliable or mainstream sources.
- Demonstrate proficiency in library and/or online research methods for scholarly materials.
- Describe two or more ethical theories and contrast their differences in method and outcomes by applying them to literary scenarios.
- Interpret, explain, and critique complex philosophical texts.
- Articulate and justify a philosophical interpretation of a literary text.

COURSE FORMAT
The graded essays must be submitted through SafeAssign in WebCampus by midnight of the due date, as per the class schedule. Late assignments will not be accepted unless the instructor has been notified before the deadline, in which case a late penalty of up to a third of a letter grade per day will be applied, unless an extension is given. Papers more than a week late cannot be accepted, and all assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Extensions will be granted in cases of illness or according to unique circumstances. You are expected to come to each class having completely read the assigned readings, and you are strongly encouraged to read ahead on the major texts, which will require greater reading time.

REQUIRED TEXTS

**ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES**

1. All essays should follow the MLA style manual. All formal essays must be double-spaced and typed in the format we outline in class and as per the template on the course website. If you do not have access to a computer or typewriter and are unable to use the equipment on campus, please see the instructor to make alternate arrangements.

2. All essays *must* be submitted through SafeAssign in WebCampus by midnight on the due date. Any essay submitted through any other process (email or print) will be deemed late and will receive a late penalty until it is submitted through SafeAssign.

3. Students best serve their interests by regular attendance, participation, & completion of work.

**GRADING POLICIES**

1. All essays must be submitted through SafeAssign in WebCampus by midnight on the due date. All other assignments are due at the start of class on the due date. Late assignments will be penalized by one third of a grade per day (i.e., B to B-), unless the instructor has been suitably notified prior to the due date or in the case of extenuating circumstances. Extensions may be granted based on illness or according to unique circumstance, but the instructor must be consulted in advance.

2. In order to pass the course, you must hand in all essays and complete the final exam. This includes all drafts and revisions. This means that you might have “A’s” on all the papers you have handed in and still fail the course because you have not handed in all major assignments.

3. All students must consult and abide by the University’s policy on attendance as detailed in Academic Regulations <http://view2.fdu.edu/publications/student-handbook/>. Meaningful class participation is considered an important component of your grade for this course.

4. A grading rubric will be provided for essay assignments.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

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<td>Essay #2</td>
<td>(7–10 pages)</td>
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**GRADING SYSTEM**

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Discussion Board Commentary: Each week, we will have a Discussion Board topic open for the class as a whole. A meaningful posting might be a good question or a thoughtful expression of the challenges you have understanding materials (or an answer to a classmate expressing those challenges or struggles) as a response to the weekly Critical Summary given by a classmate—you do not need to know everything to make a meaningful comment or query. However, statements of opinion, taste, or a simple summary of the text are not “meaningful” in this sense for the grade. Opinions, tastes, and summaries are all things you can freely express on the Discussion Board (and hopefully will), but the meaningful posting should express critical thinking or a careful thought process for supporting a classmate in his or her questions. You receive half of your mark for your own posting and the other half of your mark for responding in another posting to a classmate. Each week you should post one comment and one response to another student’s comment. Full mark will be given based on completion of both postings each week.

Discussion Board Critical Summary: At the beginning of term, you will sign up for TWO critical summaries that you will post to the discussion board at the beginning of the assigned weeks. Your posting will focus the week’s discussion and help your classmates organize their responses for their own commentary postings. You will be asked in a selected week to include a one to three sentence excerpt from the assigned philosophy text (secondary text) that you feel represents an important challenge to your classmates or that is useful for approaching the text(s) — you will also comment on this excerpt with questions and/or propositions to engage your classmates. You will also be asked in a different selected week to include a one to three sentence excerpt from the assigned readings by Tolkien (primary text) that you feel represents an important issue in The Lord of the Rings for your classmates to discuss — you will likewise comment on this excerpt to explain its importance, question it, or offer propositions about it. On the basis of your chosen excerpt for each of these two postings, you should explain why you found this passage particularly important and/or what questions or problems it made you consider. As with the regular comments every week, you do not need to know everything to make a meaningful comment or query. You may even wish to select the most perplexing element of the readings or the part you have struggled the most to understand. For weeks in which you provide the Critical Summary, your own commentary postings will most likely be responses to a classmate’s queries rather than responses to your own posting (you do still have these standard weekly postings due as well for every week).

Essay #1 – Choose from the following essay suggestions. You may create your own topic if you consult me before 3 March. I recommend you consult critical sources when planning your paper. Your argument should be explicitly based on the critical concepts from our readings so far in relation to specific textual evidence from Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings. Your essay should be 5–8 pages and double spaced in MLA Style, not including the title page or works cited page.

- Using any of the ethical arguments we have read so far (Platonic, Utilitarian, Pragmatic, etc.), consider an ethical choice made in any of Tolkien’s works read so far. What justifications are there for Boromir’s attempt to take the ring by force? Is Bilbo justified in deceiving his companions about the ring? Are ethical choices possible while under the ring’s influence?
- Using any of the theological concepts we have read so far (Providence, eschatology, metaphysics, etc.), consider how Tolkien’s works read so far engage with theology. Does Bilbo’s good luck become a form of Providence, and if so, is it in the form of predestination or intervention? If
there is an eschatological end point to each stage of Tolkien's narrative, does this also imbue it with meaning and purpose? What are the metaphysical properties of magic, and can we know anything of them?

Annotated Bibliography – Your Annotated Bibliography will provide an MLA Style citation for each of the 10 works you select and a short annotation of approximately 1–5 sentences. You will be evaluated on the correctness of your citation style (30%) and the grammatical correctness of your annotation (30%). The remainder is based on reasonable completion of the work. The purpose of the annotated bibliography assignment is to ensure you are able to use FDU's library resources for academic research, and an ancillary purpose is to help you prepare for the final research essay. You may wish to use the bibliography assignment as direct preparation for the Final Research Essay, but this is not a requirement:

- Compile a bibliography listing TEN secondary sources. For each item in your bibliography, write a brief note on the nature of the source. Use complete sentences and correct grammar. What is the genre of the source? Is it scholarly, a review, a note, a personal response, et cetera? What is the primary purpose of the article? What is the nature of the periodical or book it is published in; is it scholarly, popular, peer-reviewed, self-published, et cetera? What aspects, if any, of the source could be useful in writing for your own scholarly work?

Your bibliography must meet the following criteria:
- no more than THREE sources may be drawn from the materials linked in WebCampus
- no more than TWO sources may be “notes” or “reviews.” A “note” is generally a very brief article, consisting of 1–3 pages, focused on a highly specific element of the text. A “review” is generally published in a newspaper or popular magazine, and it is usually less than 2 pages. Scholarly review in research periodicals are typically labeled “review” and appear in the reviews section (ie: reviewing a book).
- NONE of the sources may be assigned course readings.
- Wikipedia and non-academic online resources (ie: newspapers, popular magazines, blogs) are not acceptable for this assignment and will not receive a grade.
- A minimum of SIX of the sources must be from academic resources in the library or online library—do not rely on Google or public resources when you have excellent scholarly sources available to you already.

Essay #2 – Choose from the following essay suggestions. You may create your own topic, with approval, if you consult me before 28 April. You must use secondary sources appropriate to your topic in both focus and quantity. Your paper should demonstrate a grasp of both the primary text(s) you choose to write on and the critical materials available. This means that you must show an understanding of the reliability of critical materials, how to find scholarly criticism, and an ability to judge whether a work is dated or current. While some topics will have more or less critical materials available than others, I advise a 3–4 sources minimum. You may wish to consider biographical materials, letters, print history, journals, or other such sources as well. Your essay should be 7–10 pages and double spaced in MLA Style, not including the title page or works cited page.

- Draw on one of the philosophical paradigms we have encountered in the course to respond to Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings. You may use any philosophical materials we have covered in order to develop a more nuanced or meaningful reading of the novels. Alternatively, you may use the novels to interrogate the philosophical paradigm. For example, (1) if Tolkien’s works embrace and eschatological worldview, is their meaning inherent in their end? If Tolkien’s works are eschatological, why do they focus so strongly on recurrence and return, as in “The Riddle of Strider”? (2) If Tolkien’s concerns are principally ethical, how do we distinguish between free choice and coerced choice based on the unconscious manipulations of the ring of power? Is it
possible for coerced subjects or overdetermined subjectivities to engage in ethical choice? (3) If not all who wander are lost, is this because they find meaning or make meaning?

• Several of the philosophical texts we have read would appear to challenge Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. How do you critique or defend the book from these perspectives? For example, (1) reading Marx helps us to notice the intensely class-based structure of Middle-earth and especially Hobbit society. Is this society inevitably led into a dialectical conflict? (2) Tolkien described Middle-earth as expressing a religious vision, Sartre and Nietzsche would suggest that humans make their own purpose. Can we accept either existentialism without finding Tolkien part of a past worldview? (3) Ecological or Green philosophies draw attention to the non-human, yet Tolkien anthropomorphizes nature. Can we accept Tolkien's ecological Middle-earth without eliding the difference between the human and the non-human? (4) If death is a “gift” to humans and immortality is a “gift” to elves, how do we contrast Aragorn's eventual demise against Gandalf's reincarnation?

**Final Examination:** The final examination for this course will be conducted as a “viva voce” (interview) online through Skype or other audio or video communications. Students must have access to either a telephone or computer system that supports audio/video conferencing or Skype. Three questions will comprise the examination: (1) an oral defense of your final essay, (2) discussing your final essay's topic or approach in relation to a different text or paradigm, and (3) a comparison of two course readings. Evaluation is based on three criteria ranked in order of importance: (1) demonstrated completion of the course of studies, (2) demonstrated understanding of the critical concepts of the course, and (3) the capacity for creative or innovative thought. More succinctly, the exam will test if students completed the course and achieved a reasonable level of comprehension.

**CLASSROOM AND EMAIL ETIQUETTE**

Classroom etiquette is to be upheld at all times throughout the duration of this course. This means you should be on time and turn off your mobile phones or place them on silent. Respect your fellow students while they are speaking or asking questions, and be attentive during class time. With regard email, take as much care as you do with written assignments. Be sure to write clearly and to proofread your messages. Avoid abbreviations and other texting shortcuts. Never send an email in anger. When you compose an email to your instructor, ask yourself these questions:

• is the answer in my textbook?
• is this question a result of not paying attention in class? If so, have I endeavored to discuss this with a classmate first?
• have I checked the course website for the detailed schedule?
• have I re-read my composition for error-free writing?
• did I address my instructor appropriately?
• did I sign my composition?
• did I include any attachments (where applicable)?

**WITHDRAWALS**

In the event you choose to withdraw from our course, the burden of following through with the withdrawal process is your responsibility. You may or may not be dropped for excessive absences. However, failure to attend does not guarantee being dropped. Please understand that if you do not officially withdraw **before the end of 5 April**, you will be assigned a grade based upon what you have earned. Please refer to the College Catalogue for more detail. If you believe you must withdraw for any reason, consult me first.
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Fairleigh Dickinson University adheres to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Any student with documented medical, psychological or learning disabilities who feels s/he may need in-class academic adjustments, reasonable modifications and/or auxiliary aids and services while taking this course, should first contact the Associate Provost at 201-692-2477 (Metropolitan Campus) or 973-443-8079 (Florham Park Campus). Once the academic adjustments, modifications or auxiliary aids and services are approved, make an appointment to see the professor. All materials required for the course are accessible to individuals with sensory disabilities.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
I prosecute all violations of academic integrity, including plagiarism, in accord with the Calendar and regardless of personal circumstances. Using secondary sources is a benefit to academic writing and will help you in this course, but please ensure you cite appropriately. If you are in doubt, consult the instructor. If you are still uncertain if your citations are adequate, please discuss this with me before I mark your paper. Intellectual honesty is accepted as the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge. Since knowledge is cumulative, further advances are predicated on the contributions of others. To claim contributions and ideas of another as one’s own is to deprive oneself of the opportunity to participate in the scholarly process. Therefore, students enrolled at FDU are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic dishonesty includes
- cheating (giving and/or receiving unauthorized assistance in any exercise or examination)
- plagiarism (representing the ideas or words of others as one’s own)
- falsification (inventing or falsifying information, citation or data in any exercise)
- multiple submission (submitting substantial portions of any academic exercise more than once for credit without the prior approval of the instructor)
- complicity (facilitating any of the above actions or performing work that another student presents as his/hers)
- interference (hampering another student from performing his/her assignments).
According to the FDU student handbook, students who engage in acts of academic dishonesty may, at the discretion of the instructor, be failed for the course, receive a reduced grade in the course, receive no credit for the assignment, and/or be recommended to the Dean for academic probation. Other penalties can include permanent expulsion from the University with an indication of academic dishonesty on a student’s transcripts.

IMPORTANT DATES
Classes Begin, 8:00 AM (Tuesday) January 22
Last Day for New Registrations and Final Drop/Add Changes February 4
Midterm Progress Reporting Opens (Monday) February 25
Spring Recess March 11–16
Classes Resume, 8:00 AM March 18
Midterm Grades Due March 23
Last Day for Student Withdrawal from Classes (Friday) April 5
Last Day of Spring Classes (Monday) May 6
Reading/Snow Make-up Days May 7–8
Final Examinations (Thursday–Wednesday) May 9–15
Spring Semester Ends, 11:00 PM (Wednesday) May 15
University Commencement (Tuesday) May 21
COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

January

22 Week 1  Introduction & Propositions

Propositions  Tolkien The Hobbit (chapters 1–9)

28 Week 2  Tolkien The Hobbit (chapters 1–19)

Propositions  Westphal “The Nature of a Philosophical Problem” (Philosophical Propositions 1–11)

February

4 Week 3  Tolkien The Fellowship of the Ring (Book I: The Ring Sets Out)

Ethics  Plato “The Ring of Gyges” coursepack

Katz “The Rings of Tolkien & Plato” (TLotR&P pp. 5–20)

11 Week 4  Tolkien The Fellowship of the Ring (Book I: The Ring Sets Out)

Ethics  Skoble “Virtue & Vice in The Lord of the Rings” (TLotR&P pp. 110–119)

18 Week 5  Tolkien The Fellowship of the Ring (Book II: The Ring Goes South)

Ethics  James “The Moral Philosopher & the Moral Life” WebCampus

Mill “What Utilitarianism Is” coursepack

25 Week 6  Tolkien The Fellowship of the Ring (Book II: The Ring Goes South)

Theology  Davenport “Happy Endings & Religious Hope” (TLotR&P pp. 204–218)

March

4 Week 7  Tolkien The Two Towers (Book III: The Treason of Isengard)

Theology  Hibbs “Providence & the Dramatic Unity of The Lord of the Rings” (TLotR&P pp. 167–178)

10 Essay #1: DUE

11 Week 8  Spring Recess: CAMPUS CLOSED

18 Week 9  Tolkien The Two Towers (Book III: The Treason of Isengard)

Materialism  Milbank “My precious” (TLotR&P pp. 33–45)

25 Week 10  Tolkien The Two Towers (Book IV: The Ring Goes East)

Materialism  Marx “Proletarians & Communists” coursepack

April

1 Week 11  Tolkien The Two Towers (Book IV: The Ring Goes East)

Materialism  Marx “Preface” coursepack

8 Week 12  Tolkien The Return of the King (Book V: The War of the Ring)

Existentialism  Nietzsche: “The Madman” coursepack

Blount “Überhobbits” (TLotR&P pp. 87–98)

14 Annotated Bibliography: DUE

15 Week 13  Tolkien The Return of the King (Book V: The War of the Ring)

Existentialism  Davis “Choosing to Die” (TLotR&P pp. 123–136)

Sartre “Existentialism is a Humanism” WebCampus
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<th>Week</th>
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| 22   | Week 14        | Tolkien *The Return of the King* (Book VI: The End of the Third Age)  
| 29   | Week 15        | Tolkien *The Return of the King* (Book VI: The End of the Third Age)  
Ecology | Niiler “Green Reading” *WebCampus* |
|      | May            |                                        |
| 6    | Week 16        | Catch-up & Review                      |
|      |                | Essay #2: DUE                          |
|      |                | Reading Days                           |
| 9–15 |                | Final Examination Period               |