University of St. Thomas, Department of Philosophy

Syllabus: Philosophy in Literature

Spring 2015

Instructor: Theodore P. Rebard, PhD; office: Sullivan House, room 103; telephone (713)525-3593; e-mail rebard@stthom.edu; office hours M & W 2:00-3:00; Tu & Th 1:00-4:30 p.m, and by appointment.


Objective: To discover the vision of truth taught via the imagination in JRRT's greatest work, the greatest English-language literary work of the 20th century. We will find that, with the ‘veil of familiarity’ removed, the great perennial philosophical truths about God, man, morality, and the universe are presented to the mind and heart of the reader, proposed as exemplars for a profoundly wise life both in theory and in practice: the real existence and relevance of God, the nature of man as rational animal, the objectivity of moral standards, the robust power of the human mind to know the truth with certainty, and excellence as mandatum. Tolkien himself was alive with the love for truth and the knowledge of goodness, and deliberately suffused his work with this spirit.

Method: The course will proceed by both lectures and class discussion. In this discussion, familiarity with the reading is of course required, and ensuing questions, discussion, and commentary are both encouraged and expected. It remains, however, to the instructor to provide intellectual order and discipline.

Miscellany: Promptness as well as attendance and attention are essential. No classes are to be missed without express permission of the instructor, who is to be notified promptly in such cases. Two or more unexcused absences are sufficient reason to fail the entire course, any other considerations notwithstanding. There is to be no use of electronic devices except for lap-top computers, which are to be used only for note-taking.

Grading: A = 90-100; B = 80-90; C = 70-80; D = 60-70. ‘Plus’ and ‘minus’ are divided by .33 within the tens. (e.g., 90-93 = A-; 87-89 = B+, etc.)

ANY ACADEMIC DISHONESTY WILL YIELD A GRADE OF ‘F’ FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE.