

15.269: LITERATURE, ETHICS, AND AUTHORITY

Spring 2001

MW 2:30-4:00

E51-151

Leigh Hafrey

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We tell stories to make sense of the world. Our personal and professional lives depend on our ability to weave many elements into a coherent whole, both for us and for our fellows. Stories work with the complexity of daily life, and give us perspective on decisions we might incline to take too casually, or crises that at first resist our mastery.

In the seminar, we ask: what happens when people, events, and issues take center stage and make us question our ideas of leadership, career, and proper behavior? How do we respond to social concerns over diversity, gender, and family in the workplace, or cope with the reality of war, death, and ordinary human frailty? Through films, novels, plays, and short fiction – good stories – this seminar examines issues of freedom and control, consensus and individual expression, as they bear on our ambition to manage both work and personal life. We will also use some non-fiction – essays, speeches, letters, memoirs – to round out the discussion.

The course meets Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-4:00, Feb 7 - May 14. Books are available for purchase at The MIT Coop; many assignments are included in the course packet. Films will be screened at Sloan in advance of class sessions, at times to be arranged; they are also available for rent at most video stores.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be graded on class participation (40%); on the co-teaching with the instructor of one class (10%); and on three papers, five to seven pages in length, submitted at intervals during the semester (50%). In all cases, students' contributions will be judged for the depth of personal and philosophical insight they bring to the seminar. Paper and discussion topics will include those listed in the course description – leadership, diversity, professionalism, consensus, and so on – and will invite students to focus on one or more of the texts/films covered up to that point in the semester; to juxtapose personal experiences and those described in the course material; and to speculate on the larger implications of the material for a definition of ethical behavior.

COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE

Introduction--The Importance of Story

- 2/7 Shaw, Brown, Bromiley, "Strategic Stories: How 3M is Rewriting Business Planning" (course packet)
Du Bose Heyward, The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes
Frank Gilbreth and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, Cheaper by the Dozen (selection; course packet)

I. Leadership and Authority

- 2/12 Herman Melville, Billy Budd
2/14 David Russell, *Three Kings* (film; showing Tuesday 2/13, 7 pm, E51-145)
2/20 Alan Bennett, The Madness of George III
2/21 Masayuki Suo, *Shall We Dance?* (film; showing Tuesday 2/20, 7 pm, E51-145)
2/26 M. L. King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in Why We Can't Wait
2/28 Marleen Gorris, *Antonia's Line* (film; showing Tuesday 2/27, 7 pm, E51-145)

II. Personality and Professionalism

- 3/5 Bolt/Zinnemann, *A Man for All Seasons*, I (film; showing Th. 3/1, 7 pm, E51-145)
3/7 Bolt/Zinnemann, *A Man for All Seasons*, II
James Madison, "Federalist 10," in Hamilton/Madison/Jay, The Federalist Papers
* Paper due on assignments in Introduction and Section I of the course
3/12 Bertolt Brecht, Galileo
3/14 Vaclav Havel, "The Philadelphia Liberty Medal" (course packet)
The Bible: Genesis 1-2 (course packet)
3/19 Oliver Stone, *Wall Street* (film; showing Thursday 3/15, 7 pm, E51-145)
Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas (selections; course packet)
4/2 Panel Discussion on professions and professional standards
Donald Schön, The Reflective Practitioner (selections; course packet)

III. "Quantum Ethics"

- 4/4 Michael Frayn, Copenhagen
4/9 Rebecca Goldstein, "The Legacy of Raizel Kaidish" (course packet)
* Paper due on assignments in Section II of the course.

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"Quantum Ethics" contd.

- 4/11 Pearl Buck, "The Enemy" (course packet)
- 4/18 Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (film; showing Tuesday 4/17, 7 pm, E51-145)
- 4/23 Bill Joy, "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us" (course packet)
"U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (handout)

IV. In Search of the Good Society

- 4/25 Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (course packet)
- 4/30 Alain Resnais, *Mon oncle d'Amérique* (film; showing Thu. 4/26, 7 pm, E51-145)
- 5/2 Luis Puenzo, *The Official Story* (film; showing Tuesday 5/1, 7 pm, E51-145)
- 5/7 Timothy Mo, The Monkey King, Part I
- 5/9 Timothy Mo, The Monkey King, Parts II-III

V. Literature, Ethics, and Authority: The Mix

- 5/14 Leigh Hafrey, "What's in a Book?" (course packet)
Course Wrap-up
* Final paper due.