

ISS 1203: Conflict and Character

Quest 1: The Examined Life

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- Spring 2026
- 100% In-Person, no GTAs, 35 residential students
MWF 10:40 am – 11:30 am
CSE 0461
- 3 Credits

Instructor

- Prof. Giulia Ricca
- Office: CSE 0436
- Office hours: MW 4 - 5:30 pm
- Phone: 352-273-3040
- giuliaricca@ufl.edu

If you need to schedule an appointment outside of office hours, please email the course instructor.

Course Description

In this course, we ask the question: how do we develop the character to handle life's conflicts and tragic events? We will pursue answers to this problem through a study of ancient Greek drama and philosophy. We will read three tragedies: Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*. We will also read Plato and Aristotle Stoics to grapple with classical philosophical accounts of the relationship between virtue, practical reasoning, and human flourishing. Through our study of these plays, we will explore questions concerning ethics, responsibility, and luck. We will reflect on how the study of philosophy and dramatic literature can enrich our experience and understanding of each, and how that knowledge can help move us through the deepest difficulties of life. Students will compare conflicts faced in life at UF with those studied in Greek drama, to find parallels in how such events can help to shape character. Students will complete the course with an expanded and enriched knowledge of the philosophy and drama of ancient Greece, and a deeper understanding of how the wisdom of antiquity can inform the development of their own personal character and responses to difficulties and conflicts in their own lives.

Quest and General Education Credit

- Quest 1
- Humanities
- Writing Requirement (WR) 2000 words

This course accomplishes the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.

The Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning.

Course grades have two components. To receive writing requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course.

Required Readings and Works

Students should purchase the following texts:

- Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, translated by Robert Fagles (New York, NY: Penguin 1984);
- Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987);
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2014).

All other readings will be made available in Canvas or provided in class; bibliographic information is included in the weekly schedule.

- Papers will need to follow MLA style. The writing manual for this course is: Wayne C. Booth, *The Craft of Research*, 4th ed. (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016).
- Materials and Supplies Fees: n/a

Course Objectives

- Identify, describe, and explain the methodologies used across humanities disciplines to examine essential ideas about character formation and its relation to tragic events.
- Identify, describe, and explain key ideas and questions about the nature of virtue, happiness, and tragedy as presented in the philosophical and dramatic traditions of ancient Greece.
- Analyze how philosophical and dramatic works from ancient Athens explore the pursuit of wisdom and proper choice in the face of personal, familial, political, and divine conflict.
- Analyze and evaluate specific accounts of human reaction to tragedy and the development of virtue and character across diverse texts and works from ancient Greece, using close reading, critical analysis and group discussion, and personal reflection.
- Develop and present clear and effective written and oral work that demonstrates critical engagement with course texts, visual and auditory media, and experiential learning activities.
- Communicate well-supported ideas and arguments effectively within class discussion and debates, with clear oral presentation and written work articulating students' personal experiences and reflections on ideals of virtue and tragedy in the pursuit of a good life.
- Connect course content with students' intellectual, personal, and professional lives at UF and beyond.
- Reflect on students' own and others' experience with handling conflict and tragedy while maintaining a sense of personal character and integrity, in class discussion and written work.

II. Graded Work

Description of Graded Work

Active Participation and Class Attendance: 20%

- An exemplar participant shows evidence of having done the assigned reading before each class, consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion, and listens considerately to other discussants. See participation rubric below.
- This is a discussion-driven course. If you are reluctant to speak in class, then you should reach out to Professor Ricca to discuss this.
- On-time class attendance, with no more than 2 unexcused absences, is required for this component of the course grade.
- Documentation is required for excused absences, per university policy. Excessive unexcused absences (past 6) can result in failure of the course.

• Reading Reflections and Responses (4 all term – worth 5 points each): 20%

- 4 times over the semester you will have Reading Reflections and Responses Due, which will be turned in on the Canvas Discussion Board (labeled “Discussions”) for the course. The Reading Reflections will be due before the start of class on Tuesday of the week it is assigned. You will need to find two significant points for reflection in the reading or readings (if there are two readings, you should have a reflection on each). This could be raising a question or communicating your own thoughts on a particular point (for instance, providing an assessment). In each case, you should connect your reflections in some way with your own experience, and you should also quote and cite the text (author last name and page number) to indicate what part of the text you are reflecting on (or raising a question about). Before class on Friday of that week, you should reply with thoughts on both points of another student’s reflections (how do these reflections connect with your own thinking?). Both the Reflection and the Response should be at least 200 words apiece.
- Due Weeks 2, 5, 7, 9
- All writing assignments will be run through anti-plagiarism and AI-detecting software.

• Experiential Learning Paper, due Week 11: 25%

- You will watch a filmed theater production of either Sophocles’ *Antigone* or *Oedipus the King* and write a 1,500-word analytical essay focused on a thesis that describes how a particular scene reflects aspects of character-shaping conflict (or hardship) that we have studied in class. You will also find a parallel character-shaping conflict (or hardship) at UF, and draw comparisons between the two. You will also reflect on whether these support or challenge the views about the relationship between virtue and happiness found in the works of Plato and Aristotle that we studied. See “Experiential Learning Component,” in syllabus, below. See grading rubric in Canvas.
- Professor will evaluate and provide written feedback.
- You may want to access the university’s Writing Studio at www.writing.ufl.edu
- An additional writing guide website can be found at <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/>
- See Writing Assessment Rubric on syllabus, below
- All writing assignments will be run through anti-plagiarism and AI-detecting software.

- **Self-Reflection Paper, due Week 13: 10%**

- You will write a short paper (500 words) on your own personal experience to answer the question, “Is personal character best developed through difficult circumstances?” See “Self-Reflection Component,” in syllabus, below. (R) This is graded not as an analytical paper, but instead as a personal reflection. The “Writing Assessment Rubric” will be used, excepting the grade for use of sources.
- All writing assignments will be run through anti-plagiarism and AI-detecting software.

- **Final Exam, Week 14: 25%**

- Wednesday, April 22nd
- Short-answer questions; allowed full 50-minute class period to answer
- Review session preceding class period

III. Annotated Weekly Schedule

WEEK 1 (JAN 12, 14, 16): INTRODUCING CHARACTER AND CONFLICT

To what extent is our well-being up to us, and to what extent is it up to chance, luck, fate, or providence? How can our character help us to confront the conflicts and hardships that we encounter in life? How is it shaped by them? We will introduce and begin exploring these major questions of our course.

Readings (22 pages):

1. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986): 1-22.

WEEK 2 (JAN 21, 23): SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS THE KING*: IGNORANCE AND LUCK

When we act in ignorance, are we responsible for what we do and for what we bring about? Does it have any impact on our sense of our character? We will discuss Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*, and consider ignorance and the nature of moral luck.

Readings (52 pages):

1. Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, lines 1-706 (159-210).

Assignment: First Reading Reflection and Response Due

WEEK 3 (JAN 26, 28, 30): SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS THE KING*: IGNORANCE AND LUCK, CONT.

We will continue to examine responsibility during tragic personal circumstances in Oedipus's story arc, and consider Oedipus as the paradigmatic tragic figure.

Readings (40 pages):

1. Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, lines 707-1684 (211-251).

WEEK 4 (FEB 2, 4, 6): SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS AT COLONUS*: EXILE AND PROPEHCY

In this first half, we meet Oedipus as a wandering exile, confronting his past and the shadow of fate, while the chorus meditates on suffering, piety, and the power of place.

Readings (44 pages):

1. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, lines 1-719 (283-327)

WEEK 5 (FEB 9, 11, 13): SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS AT COLONUS*: FAMILY CONFLICT, FATE, AND DEATH

The tensions of family, power, and fate come to a climax as Oedipus confronts his sons and mortality, culminating in a death that reshapes his identity from cursed to sacred.

Readings (59 pages):

1. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, lines 720-1779 (329-388)

Assignment: Second Reading Reflection and Response Due

WEEK 6 (FEB 16, 18, 20): SOPHOCLES' ANTIGONE: TRAGEDY AND CHARACTER

Can moral principles conflict? How should we address apparent conflicts between family duties and political duties? Should duties of piety supersede other duties? We will examine these questions through discussing Sophocles' *Antigone* and how different characters exhibit different virtues and vices that drive the plot of the play.

Readings (55 pages):

1. Sophocles, *Antigone*: lines 1-626 (59-88).

WEEK 7 (FEB 23, 25, 27): SOPHOCLES' ANTIGONE: TRAGEDY AND CHARACTER, CONTINUED.

Is personal character most strongly developed in tragic circumstances? We continue our discussion of *Antigone*, with a particular focus on individual characters' choices, and the relationship between character, practical reasoning, and deliberation.

Readings (51 pages):

1. Sophocles, *Antigone*: lines 636-1353 (88-128).

Assignment: Third Reading Reflection and Response Due

WEEK 8 (MARCH 2, 4, 6): PLATO ON PIETY AND THE EXAMINED LIFE

We will examine Plato's discussion of the nature of piety in his dialogue the *Euthyphro*, where the principal character is Socrates, and we will also examine Socrates' defense against charges of impiety along with his defense of what he calls "the examined life" in Plato's *Apology*.

Readings (36 pages):

1. Plato, *Euthyphro* (pp. 1-16); Plato, *The Apology* (pp. 17-36)

WEEK 9 (MARCH 9, 11, 13): ARISTOTLE ON VIRTUE AND THE QUEST FOR HAPPINESS

We will explore Aristotle's view on the relationship between virtue and happiness. While Aristotle thinks that virtue is necessary for true happiness, he does not think it is sufficient because misfortune can mar our happiness, though even here he thinks nobility "shine through." We will focus in particular on Aristotle's discussion of the tragic case of King Priam. We will explore his account of the virtues of character and how

they are acquired.

Readings (40 pages):

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I-II, IX.9 (pp. 1-35, 191-195)

Assignment: Fourth Reading Reflection and Response Due

WEEK 10 (MARCH 23, 25, 27): ARISTOTLE ON RESPONSIBILITY, COURAGE, TEMPERANCE,
GENEROSITY, AND LACK OF SELF-CONTROL

We will explore Aristotle's views on how we are responsible for our character, and we will focus in on three specific virtues: courage, temperance, and generosity. We will explore the problem of weakness of the will, or lack of self-control, where we do not do the good that we know we should do.

Readings (42 pages):

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books III-IV.1, VII.1-10 (pp. 35-61, 113-129)

WEEK 11 (MARCH 30, APR 1, 3): ARISTOTLE ON JUSTICE, FRIENDSHIP, AND CONTEMPLATION

We will consider two most important other-regarding virtues in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: justice and friendship. We will also explore why Aristotle says: "if people are friends, there is no need for justice, whereas people who are just need friendship in addition to justice ... [and] of just things the most just of all seems to be fitted to friendship." We will also explore Aristotle's argument for the claim that the contemplation is the highest form of human activity, and how there appears to be a tension between this claim and he is advocacy of a life of virtue within political community.

Readings (31 pages):

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V.1-2; VIII.1-4, 8; IX.4-9; X.6-8 (pp. 77-81, 136-141, 145-146, 160-170, 184-190)

Assignment: 1,500-wd Experiential Learning analytical papers due

WEEK 12 (APR 6, 8, 10): RHETORIC AND TRUTH

We will begin reflection on Plato's *Gorgias*, which seeks to defend the ethical life as necessary and sufficient for happiness.

Readings (49 pages):

1. Plato, *Gorgias*, lines 447a-480a (1-49)

WEEK 13 (APR 13, 15, 17): IS IT BETTER TO SUFFER INJUSTICE THAN TO CAUSE INJUSTICE?

We will take up the key question explored in Plato's *Gorgias*, which is in the topic line: Is it better to suffer injustice than to cause injustice? We will also discuss the following questions Is moral harm worse than physical harm? Can the unjust be happy? Can the just be unhappy?

Readings (64 pages):

1. Plato, *Gorgias*: lines 480a-527a (pp. 49-113)

Assignment: Self-reflection papers due

WEEK 14 (APR 20, 22): CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL EXAM IN CLASS

IV. Grading Scale and Rubrics

Grading Scale

For information on UF’s grading policies for assigning grade points, see [here](#).

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76%
A–	90 – 93%		C–	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B–	80 – 83%		D–	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

Grading Rubrics

Participation Rubric

A (90-100%)	Typically comes to class with pre-prepared questions about the readings. Engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others and consistently elevates the level of discussion.
B (80-89%)	Does not always come to class with pre-prepared questions about the reading. Waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.
C (70-79%)	Attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion. Is only adequately prepared for discussion.
D (60-69%)	Fails to attend class regularly and is inadequately prepared for discussion. Is an unwilling participant in discussion.
E (<60%)	Attends class infrequently and is wholly unprepared for discussion. Refuses to participate in discussion.

Examination Rubric: Essays and Short Answers

	Completeness	Analysis	Evidence	Writing
A (90-100%)	Shows a thorough understanding of the question. Addresses all aspects of the question completely.	Analyses, evaluates, compares and/or contrasts issues and events with depth.	Incorporates pertinent and detailed information from both class discussions and assigned readings.	Presents all information clearly and concisely, in an organized manner.
B (80-89%)	Presents a general understanding of the question. Completely addresses most aspects of the question or address all aspects incompletely.	Analyses or evaluates issues and events, but not in any depth.	Includes relevant facts, examples and details but does not support all aspects of the task evenly.	Presents information fairly and evenly and may have minor organization problems.
C (70-79%)	Shows a limited understanding of the question. Does not address most aspects of the question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events beyond stating accurate, relevant facts.	Includes relevant facts, examples and details, but omits concrete examples, includes inaccurate information and/or does not support all aspects of the task.	Lacks focus, somewhat interfering with comprehension.
D (60-69%)	Fails fully to answer the specific central question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events beyond stating vague, irrelevant, and/or inaccurate facts.	Does not incorporate information from pertinent class discussion and/or assigned readings.	Organizational problems prevent comprehension.
E (<60%)	Does not answer the specific central question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events.	Does not adduce any evidence.	Incomprehensible organization and prose.

Writing Rubric

	Thesis and Argumentation	Use of Sources	Organization	Grammar, mechanics and style
A (90-100%)	Thesis is clear, specific, and presents a thoughtful, critical, engaging, and creative interpretation. Argument fully supports the thesis both logically and thoroughly.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are well incorporated, utilized, and contextualized throughout.	Clear organization. Introduction provides adequate background information and ends with a thesis. Details are in logical order. Conclusion is strong and states the point of the paper.	No errors.
B (80-89%)	Thesis is clear and specific, but not as critical or original. Shows insight and attention to the text under consideration. May have gaps in argument's logic.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are incorporated but not contextualized significantly.	Clear organization. Introduction clearly states thesis, but does not provide as much background information. Details are in logical order, but may be more difficult to follow. Conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all loose ends.	A few errors.
C (70-79%)	Thesis is present but not clear or specific, demonstrating a lack of critical engagement to the text. Argument is weak, missing important details or making logical leaps with little support.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are mostly incorporated but are not properly contextualized.	Significant lapses in organization. Introduction states thesis but does not adequately provide background information. Some details not in logical or expected order that results in a distracting read. Conclusion is recognizable but does not tie up all loose ends.	Some errors.
D (60-69%)	Thesis is vague and/or confused. Demonstrates a failure to understand the text. Argument lacks any logical flow and does not utilize any source material.	Primary and/or secondary texts are almost wholly absent.	Poor, hard-to-follow organization. There is no clear introduction of the main topic or thesis. There is no clear conclusion, and the paper just ends. Little or no employment of logical body paragraphs.	Many errors.
E (<60%)	There is neither a thesis nor any argument.	Primary and/or secondary texts are wholly absent.	The paper is wholly disorganized, lacking an introduction, conclusion or any logical coherence.	Scores of errors.

V. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the [Quest](#) the [General Education student learning outcomes](#) for Humanities (H).

[Humanities \(H\)](#) Humanities courses must afford students the ability to think critically through the mastering of subjects concerned with human culture, especially literature, history, art, music, and philosophy, and must include selections from the Western canon.

Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

Content: *Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the discipline(s).*

- Identify, describe, and explain the methodologies used across humanities disciplines to examine essential ideas about character formation and its relation to tragic events (Quest 1, H). **Assessment:** final exam, experiential learning analytical essay, reading reflections.
- Identify, describe, and explain key ideas and questions about the nature of virtue, happiness, and tragedy as presented in the philosophical and dramatic traditions of ancient Greece (Quest 1, H). **Assessment:** final exam, experiential learning analytical essay, reading reflections

Critical Thinking: *Students carefully and logically analyse information from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems within the discipline(s).*

- Analyze how philosophical and dramatic works from ancient Athens explore the pursuit of wisdom and proper choice in the face of personal, familial, political, and divine conflict. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** analytical essay, reading reflections
- Analyze and evaluate specific accounts of human reaction to tragedy and the development of virtue and character across diverse texts and works from ancient Greece, using close reading, critical analysis and group discussion, and personal reflection. (Quest 1, H). **Assignments:** reading reflections, self-reflection paper, experiential learning paper

Communication: *Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline(s).*

- Develop and present clear and effective written and oral work that demonstrates critical engagement with course texts, visual and auditory media, and experiential learning activities (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** experiential learning paper, discussion questions, final exam, self-reflection paper, class participation
- Communicate well-supported ideas and arguments effectively within class discussion and debates, with clear oral presentation and written work articulating students' personal experiences and reflections on ideals of virtue and tragedy in the pursuit of a good life (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** active class participation, experiential learning paper, reading reflections

Connection: *Students connect course content with meaningful critical reflection on their intellectual, personal, and professional development at UF and beyond.*

- Connect course content with students' intellectual, personal, and professional lives at UF and beyond. (Quest 1). **Assessments:** self-reflection paper, experiential learning paper, discussion questions
- Reflect on students' own and others' experience with handling conflict and tragedy while maintaining a sense of personal character and integrity, in class discussion and written work (Quest 1). **Assessments:** experiential learning paper, self-reflection paper, reading reflections

VI. Quest Learning Experiences

1. Details of Experiential Learning Component

The George A. Smathers Library has a database of theater productions online. At the link <https://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/theatreguide>, you will find the “Digital Theatre Plus” database. There you will find filmed theatre productions of Sophocles’ *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King*. You will watch one of these and write a 1,500-word analytical essay focused on a thesis that describes how a particular scene reflects aspects of character-shaping conflict (or hardship) that we have studied in class (in your essay you will identify the time on the video of the play you watched). You will also find a parallel character-shaping conflict (or hardship) at UF, and draw comparisons between the two, underlining how Greek tragedy can offer parallels for our own choices in the contemporary world, and at UF. Regarding the particular scene, you should describe it and why you chose it. You should also discuss whether you think the scene and contemporary situation challenges or supports the views about the relationship between virtue and happiness found in the works of Plato and Aristotle that we studied (this will be part of your thesis). No later than the end of Friday of Week 10, you should write to the instructor with the work (play and scene) on which you wish to write and a 150-word description of the scene’s relevance to our course. This emailed proposal is worth 10% of the total grade for this assignment. The final essay should be turned into the “Assignments” section of Canvas on Friday, April 3rd before the start of class.

2. Details of Self-Reflection Component

In the texts we read, we hear competing accounts of how strength of character affects responses to conflict and tragedy. In the plays we read, we see a variety of stories in which vice and personal flaws result in disaster. In an essay of 500-600 words, please answer the question: “Is personal character best developed through difficult circumstances?” Your answer should draw on specific examples NOT primarily from our texts, but from your own experience. You may use anecdotes to describe how you came to the view you hold, and how your view of the relationship between hardship and character may have changed or developed over time. Finally, you should include in your essay a few sentences of commentary on how you have brought your sense of your personal character to your life at the University of Florida.

VII. Required Policies

Academic Policy

Further academic policies and resources can be found here- <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies>