Philosophical Themes in the Novels
UGS 303, Ideas of the Twentieth Century

Your primary task in the readings papers is to defend a thesis roughly of the form "Philosophical theme *X* is present in work *Y.*" (Of course, you do not have to write a sentence of exactly this form.) Carrying out this task will likely involve two secondary tasks: **clarifying core concepts** and **providing evidence from the work to support your thesis**.

Here is a rough example of how this should work. Perhaps you think that in Christie's novel Poirot resembles Sherlock Holmes in various ways. You may then set out to defend the thesis that certain Enlightenment ideals are manifest in Christie's work, by showing that Poirot embodies certain of those ideals. The task is then to say a little bit about what those ideals entail (saying what Enlightenment thinkers mean by "objective truth" or "realism", for example), and then provide textual evidence (either in the form of a direct quotation or reference to a certain passage in the work) that Poirot either endorses these ideals explicitly or embodies them by his behavior.

Some of you have asked how to identify philosophical themes in the novels. You'll get a clearer idea as the course progresses, but, for now, here's a list of some philosophical themes that might get your creative and interpretive juices flowing. Don'y feel constrained to choose something from this list; these are just suggestions to give you the flavor of the kind of thing we're looking for.

truth
realism
idealism
reality and appearance
relativism
perspectivism

the nature of philosophy
personal identity
objectivity
God
religion
necessity and contingency
time
destiny

human nature
free will

logic
knowledge
evidence
language
theorizing
reason vs. feeling
belief

right and wrong
moral decisions
moral problems
'is' and 'ought'
evil
temptation
weakness of will
reasons

freedom
autonomy
self-deception
authenticity

love
human relationships
guilt
innocence
happiness
responsibility

self-respect
respect
kindness
wisdom
trust and betrayal

honesty
sincerity and insincerity

beauty
art
fiction
meaning
interpretation