

Department of Philosophy  
University of Toronto, St. George

**Aesthetics**  
**PHL285H1**

Winter 2016  
MW 12-1:30, SS 2135

**Contact Info**

Instructor: Scott Howard  
Office: JH 414  
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:30-5:00  
Email: scott.howard@utoronto.ca

**Required Texts**

All readings will be available via Blackboard (Course Materials).

**Course Description**

This course will consider a variety of topics in the philosophy of art, including:

- The paradox of fiction: how is it possible to have genuine emotional responses to make-believe people and events? Are such emotions rational or irrational?
- The paradoxes of tragedy and horror: why do we seek out sad or frightening experiences in art, when we are averse to them in our everyday lives?
- Standards of taste: is there anything more to aesthetic taste than one's subjective preferences? Can one person have better taste than another? What does one's taste say about the depth, or shallowness, of one's emotions? Can one fail to respond properly to a piece of art?
- Issues of authenticity and appropriation: what is it to perform a song authentically or inauthentically? Can some music only be performed authentically by some performers? What constitutes offensive cultural appropriation in art and entertainment?
- Beauty and time: is there a special relationship between beauty and impermanence, or between the experience of beauty and the feeling of transcending ordinary temporality? Are there forms of 'aestheticizing' the past (or the present) that are suspect?
- A variety of challenges to art and beauty: are some aesthetic emotions, such as wonder, foolish? Does desire, which often accompanies the encounter with beauty, interfere with a better 'disinterested' mode of aesthetic attention? Do the literary arts impart knowledge, or impair it? Is human beauty an unjust form of privilege?

Readings will span historical and contemporary philosophical writing, works of literary and art criticism, journalism and commentary, and some fiction and poetry. Our guiding examples will be drawn from literature, film, music, and photography. Our central concern will be practical and normative: what is, or ought to be, the importance of art in a life?

## Course Requirements

- 10% Pop Quizzes (x 4)
- 15% First Paper, due Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup>
- 20% Second Paper, due March 9<sup>th</sup>
- 25% Third Paper, due April 6<sup>th</sup>
- 30% Final Exam (2 hrs, in the April exam period)

### *Pop Quizzes (10%)*

There will be four pop quizzes throughout the semester; it is your responsibility to bring a pen to every class in case. Each quiz will consist of a few questions about the assigned readings for that lecture, or a recent lecture. If you miss lecture that day, there will be no way to make up the quiz (the only exception is providing official documentation for your absence; see 'Extension Policy' below). Pop quizzes will be graded but not returned.

### *Papers (15%, 20%, 25%)*

Topics and guidelines for the papers will be posted at least two weeks before each due date. The first paper will be a very short exposition or 'reconstruction' of a philosopher's argument; the second will require both reconstructing and criticizing an argument; and the third will involve all of the above, as well as anticipating and rebutting an objection to your own position. All papers will be submitted and returned via Grade Center on Blackboard.

Note: PHL 285 has been designated as a WIT course. WIT stands for 'Writing Instruction for/by TAs'; such courses are allotted extra TA hours to evaluate student writing. So although the written assignments in this course are fairly short, they will be assessed carefully and held to high standards. Starting early and revising multiple drafts of each paper is highly recommended. In addition, on the second and third papers, you will need to append a short reflective paragraph explaining how you implemented the main advice for improvement that your TA gave you in their comments on your previous paper.

### *Final Exam (30%)*

The final exam will cover material from the readings and the lectures from the entire course. I will do an exam review and give you some study tips during the last class of the semester.

## Late Policy

Late papers will be penalized 5% per day, and not accepted after one week has elapsed. So, since each paper is due on a Wednesday at 11:30am, the late penalties will work like this:

<u>Submission time</u>	<u>Penalty</u>
Wednesday after 11:30am, or Thursday	5%
Friday	10%
Saturday	15%
Sunday	20%
Monday	25%
Tuesday	30%
Wednesday	Not accepted

## **Extension Policy**

My policy on extensions is pretty strict. Extensions will be granted only if I receive official university documentation. Medical excuses require a University of Toronto Medical Certificate, and other excuses (e.g. personal and family emergencies) require a letter from the registrar or other relevant university authority. If you will need an extension and you will get such documentation, please notify me as far in advance as possible, preferably by email. Your assignment will be graded once I receive the documentation. If you miss a pop quiz but supply the above sort of documentation to explain your absence that day, you will have an opportunity to write a make-up quiz during the last class of the semester.

## **Class Attendance**

To succeed in this course, you will need to do the assigned readings in advance, attend lecture, and take notes: my complete lecture slides will *not* be posted to Blackboard. If missing a lecture is unavoidable, it is your responsibility to seek notes from another student.

## **Policy on Phones, Tablets, and Laptops in Class**

The use of electronic devices in the classroom is strongly discouraged, including for note taking purposes. This is for two reasons. First, there are reasons to think that taking handwritten notes is more conducive to understanding the material; taking notes on a laptop encourages rote transcription and is associated with both lower understanding and lower retention of information. For a summary, check out:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

Second, any device with internet access creates an almost irresistible temptation to use social media, send messages, check websites, etc. When you yield to this temptation, you are distracting yourself (obviously), your classmates (think about the texter in front of you in a movie theater), and your instructor (yes, we can tell). So you are advised to keep your electronics in your bag during lecture. I won't hesitate to ask you to leave the class if I judge that your use of technology is creating a nuisance.

## **Plagiarism Policy**

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be treated accordingly. It is the student's job to be aware of the University policy on plagiarism. The U of T Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, along with other useful sources on plagiarism and how to avoid it, can be found here: <http://life.utoronto.ca/get-smarter/academic-honesty/>

## **Turnitin.com**

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

The class ID and student enrolment password for Turnitin will be included with the paper instructions.

## **Email Policy**

I am happy to respond to emails about course business not covered in the syllabus. Philosophical questions requiring involved answers should not be taken up in emails, but rather in class or office hours. If you follow these instructions, I will try my best to respond to emails within 2 business days. If you don't receive a response after 2 business days, you should resend the email to be safe.

Please use your utoronto email address and include "PHL285" in the subject of your email to ensure that your message is not mistakenly sent to a spam folder. I will occasionally send announcements to the class via Blackboard, which only knows your utoronto.ca email address. Please check that email address (or bounce its emails to your regular account) in order to avoid missing these announcements.

## **TA Office Hours**

We have three TAs in this course. While they do not have weekly office hours, they will hold office hours after the first two papers are handed back, and before the third paper is due. I will post information on the time and place of these office hours later in the term.

## **Accessibility Services**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Please feel free to approach me or Accessibility Services so we can assist you in achieving academic success in this course. Accessibility Services on the St. George campus can be contacted at 416-978-8060, emailed at [accessibility.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:accessibility.services@utoronto.ca), and visited at 455 Spadina Ave., 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Suite 400.

## **Schedule**

Please note that this schedule is subject to change. Any amendments will be announced on Blackboard.

### WEEK 1

Jan. 11           Intro: no reading  
Jan. 13           Colin Radford, "How Can We Be Moved By the Fate of Anna Karenina?"

### WEEK 2

Jan. 18           Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions"  
Jan. 20           Catherine Wilson, "Grief and the Poet";  
Kendall Walton, "Comments on Catherine Wilson, 'Grief and the Poet'"

### WEEK 3

Jan. 25           Aaron Smuts, "Rubber Ring: Why Do We Listen to Sad Songs?";  
Daan Evers and Natalja Deng, "Acknowledgement and the Paradox of  
Tragedy"  
Jan. 27           Noël Carroll, "Why Horror?"

WEEK 4

- Feb. 1 Berys Gaut, "The Paradox of Horror";  
Cynthia Freeland, "Realist Horror";  
Feb. 3 Film screening: *Under the Skin* (note: we will screen the beginning on Feb. 1  
to fit the rest into this class)  
\* **FIRST ESSAY DUE** \*

WEEK 5

- Feb. 8 David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"  
Feb. 10 Matthew Kieran, "Why Ideal Critics Are Not Ideal";  
Elaine Scarry, "On Beauty and Being Wrong"

**READING WEEK: NO CLASS ON FEB. 15 OR FEB. 17**

WEEK 6

- Feb. 22 Anthony Savile, "Sentimentality";  
Ira Newman, "The Alleged Unwholesomeness of Sentimentality";  
David Pugmire, "Sentimentality and Truthfulness"  
Feb. 24 Carl Wilson, from *Let's Talk About Love* ("Let's Talk About Taste", "Let's  
Talk About Who Has Bad Taste")  
Pierre Bourdieu, from *Distinction*;  
Saul Austerlitz, "The Pernicious Rise of Poptimism" (*New York Times*);  
Lindsay Zoladz, "This Must Be Pop" (*Pitchfork*)

WEEK 7

- Feb. 29 Jeanette Bicknell, "Just a Song? Exploring the Aesthetics of Popular Song  
Performance";  
John Seabrook, "Blank Space: What Kind of Genius is Max Martin?" (*New  
Yorker*);  
Joel Rudinow, "Can White People Sing the Blues?"  
March 2 James O. Young, "Profound Offense and Cultural Appropriation";  
Nabeelah Jaffer, "Is Nothing Sacred?" (*Aeon*);  
Brittney Cooper, "Iggy Azalea's Post-Racial Mess" (*Salon*)

WEEK 8

- March 7 Susan Sontag, from *On Photography* ("In Plato's Cave", "Melancholy  
Objects");  
Svetlana Boym, from *The Future of Nostalgia* ("Taboo on Nostalgia?")  
March 9 Film screening: *Requiem for Detroit*  
Read: John Patrick Leary, "Detroitism" (*Guernica*)  
\* **SECOND ESSAY DUE** \*

WEEK 9

- March 14 Robert Hass, "Images";  
Rebecca Solnit, "The Blue of Distance"
- March 16 Alexander Nehamas, from *Only a Promise of Happiness* ("Plato or Schopenhauer?", "Beauty, Love, Friendship", "Art, Beauty, Desire");  
Jerome Stolnitz, "The Aesthetic Attitude"

WEEK 10

- March 21 R.W. Hepburn, "Wonder";  
Lorraine Daston, "Wonder and the Ends of Inquiry" (*The Point*)
- March 23 Tim Lilburn, "How to Be Here";  
Jan Zwicky, "Lyric, Narrative, Memory";  
Mark Strand, "Itself Now"

WEEK 11

- March 28 Plato, from the *Republic* (II, III, X);  
Iris Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good"
- March 30 Martha Nussbaum, "Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature";  
Derek Matravers, "Art and Knowledge: Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*"

WEEK 12

- April 4 Jonny Thakkar, "The Ugly Truth" (*Aeon*);  
Ted Chiang, "Liking What You See: A Documentary"
- April 6 Exam review: no reading  
\* **THIRD ESSAY DUE** \*
- TBA \* **FINAL EXAM** \*