

PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE, FILM AND  
COMICS  
PHL 1502: EVERYDAY PHILOSOPHY - AESTHETICS

FALL 2009  
T.TH. 11:00 – 12:15  
GREER HALL 119  
<http://asulearn.appstate.edu>

DR. CHRISTOPHER BARTEL

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION  
GREER HALL 115B  
bartelcj@appstate.edu  
828.262.7193  
OFFICE HOURS: M.W.F. 10:30 – 1:00

**A. Course Description:** In this course, we will examine the philosophical issues that arise in selected works of literature, film and comics. We will also examine general problems in the philosophy of literature. Students who successfully complete this course would acquire a basic understanding of some of the problems of general philosophy and the philosophy of literature. Completion of this course satisfies one of the University's General Education courses for the "How We Tell Stories" theme in the Aesthetics Perspective.

**B. Core Texts:**

**Available through the Rental System**

1. Christopher New (1999). *Philosophy of Literature*. New York: Routledge.

**Must be Purchased**

1. Douglas Adams (1979). *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. New York: Pocket Books.
2. William Golding (1959). *Lord of the Flies*. New York: Capricorn Books.
3. Alan Moore and David Gibbons (1986). *Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics.
4. Mark White, ed. (2009). *Watchmen and Philosophy*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

**C. Core Films:**

1. *Brazil* (1985). Dir. Terry Gilliam.
2. *Dark City* (1998). Dir. Alex Proyas.
3. *Idiocracy* (2006). Dir. Mike Judge.
4. *Memento* (2000). Dir. Christopher Nolan.
5. *Murderball* (2005). Dirs. Henry Rubin and Dana Shapiro.
6. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Dir. Victor Fleming.

**D. Assessment:** There are three components that you will be graded on for this course: four quizzes, four critical reviews and two essays. The total average grade for your quizzes will be worth 50% of your final grade; the total average grade for your critical reviews will be worth 20%; and the total average grade for your essays will be worth 30%.

**QUIZZES:** There will be four quizzes. These quizzes are designed to test your understanding of the materials (lectures, readings and films). The quizzes will be conducted online through the AsU Learn website (<http://asulearn.appstate.edu>), and will be scheduled outside of class time over a period of five days (from 12:15 Thursday afternoon to 11:00 Tuesday morning). Students will have ninety minutes to complete each quiz. These quizzes will be a combination of:

- Reverse Definitions: The definition of a key term will be provided and the student is expected to fill in the correct term. Taken from readings or lecture notes.
- Multiple choice: Taken from readings or lecture notes.
- Short Essays: Questions may ask students to identify the faulty premise in an argument, construct an argument, or explain the significance of an argument or idea.

**ESSAYS:** There will be a mid-term essay and final essay. For each essay, you will be given a choice of eight questions. You are to choose three of those questions and write a short response. Each question should require between three to

five paragraphs to answer. The mid-term essay will be done *in class* however the essay questions will be published on the class webpage 24 hours in advance in order to allow students time to prepare. The final essay will be take-home and will be based on questions that will be published on the AsULearn website by 12:15 on Thursday, December 3, coinciding with the final quiz. The completed essay must be submitted through the AsULearn website by 11:00am the following Tuesday, December 8.

**CRITICAL REVIEWS:** Each student will be asked to write four critical reviews of a work of art: one for literature, one for film, one for comics, and one of a piece of art on campus. Each review should be 1,000 words (+/-10%) in length, it should offer a short description of the relevant details of the work and an original critical assessment. Reviews will be graded on a pass/fail basis. The reviews will be scheduled roughly every four weeks and must be submitted through the AsULearn website by 11:00am on a Thursday before class begins.

**E. Policies: Class Attendance and Participation.** Neither class participation nor class attendance will affect the determination of your grade. However, if you regularly skip classes, then I would not expect you to do very well on the assignments; and if you do not participate in discussions, then I expect you will be very bored.

Attendance of Film Screenings. I have arranged to screen each of the films that we will discuss on campus during the semester. These screenings will be scheduled on Wednesdays at 7:00pm. Students are not required to attend these screenings—all of the films are required viewing for this course, however students are welcome to watch these films on their own time if they choose. The class film screenings are for your convenience. For copyright reasons, the only students allowed to attend these screenings will be those students enrolled in this course.

Disruptive Behavior during Film Screenings. I will not tolerate rude or disruptive behavior during a film screening. Any student who disrupts the screening by any means **will lose ten points off of their final grade for the course for each offence.** Disruptive behavior would include talking during the film, use of a cell phone during the film, throwing objects at the screen, etc. This list is not exhaustive—the determination that some behavior is disruptive will be left up to the moderator of the screening.

Late Assignments. The schedule of quizzes, essays and reviews is set in advance, which students can review on the AsULearn website. I will not accept any late assignments—**no exceptions.**

Cheating, Collusion and Plagiarism. If I *suspect* you of cheating, collusion or plagiarism, I will request that you complete a new assignment. If I *discover* that you have been cheating, colluding or plagiarizing, you will automatically earn an *F* for the course, *and* you will be reported to the University for disciplinary action. **You are advised to avoid the mere suspicion of violating academic integrity.** All students are advised to familiarize themselves with the Academic Integrity Code, which can be found at the Office of Student Conduct's website (<http://studentconduct.appstate.edu/>).

Special Needs. Appalachian State University is committed to making reasonable accommodations for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Those seeking accommodations based on a substantially limiting disability must contact and register with The Office of Disability Services (ODS) at [www.ods.appstate.edu](http://www.ods.appstate.edu) or 828-262-3056. Once registration is complete, individuals will meet with ODS staff to discuss eligibility and appropriate accommodations.

Syllabus and Course Content. I reserve the right to change any part of this syllabus, including course content and policies, for any reason and without advance notice. You will be notified of any changes to the *policies* of this course via email. Any changes in *course content* will be listed on the AsULearn website—no further notification will be given.

**F. Advice on Writing Critical Reviews:** A critical review is not merely a “book report”—your job is *not* to simply say what you see. The purpose of a critical review is to offer a unique interpretation of a work of art, or to draw attention to some important or interesting aspect of the work. These reviews may be either positive or negative, but they should try to do more than state the obvious.

An interpretation of a work of art is judged on two criteria: *originality* and *plausibility*. A review is *original* if the student does not simply repeat the interpretation that the instructor has given in class. Instead of merely repeating the instructor’s lecture, the student might try to expand on what the instructor said in a new direction; or the student might disagree with the instructor’s interpretation and offer an alternative interpretation; or the student might instead discuss an aspect of the text that the instructor did not mention. These are just some suggestions for students thinking of how to write original reviews.

Of course, while some interpretations might be very insightful, other interpretations might be utter nonsense! The difference between an insightful review and nonsense is *plausibility*. To establish plausibility, the student should demonstrate how their interpretation is justified by the text. To achieve this, the student should summarize the relevant plot points or character traits as they appear in the text. The student would also do well to refer to the text directly by discussing quotes or whole passages of the text. Remember, an interpretation is nonsense if that interpretation conflicts with what the text actually says—try to achieve originality in your interpretation while avoiding nonsense!

### G. Assessment Guidelines

#### Breakdown of Grading Criterion for Essays:

Originality (0-15) — The essay contains some evidence of the student’s thinking about the issues in a unique or significant way. Examples would include the student’s offering an extended discussion of an original example or making a critical observation that significantly effects the student’s analysis.

Use of text (0-20) — Each successful essay will exhibit familiarity with the assigned readings and films through the effective use of quotes or extended discussion of the source material. The use of quotes taken from the lecture notes will not suffice.

Organization (0-20) — The organization of each essay should aid in the effectiveness of the argument and clarity of the exposition. Essays will be awarded points on the basis of clarity of organization. Points will be taken off here for essays that do not meet the required length.

Comprehension (0-20) — Each successful essay will exhibit evidence of the student’s understanding of the narrative of the source material, an appreciation of the philosophical issues and an understanding of the relevant philosophical techniques.

Clarity (0-15) — A successful essay will present the exposition and analysis clearly requiring a minimum of interpretation on the part of the reader. A poor essay is one where the reader is required to guess at the author’s meaning.

Analysis (0-10) — Any philosophical essay will ultimately will be judged by the validity of its logic.

#### Grading Scale:

A	93-100	C	73-76.99
A-	90-92.99	C-	70-72.99
B+	87-89.99	D+	67-69.99
B	83-86.99	D	63-66.99
B-	80-82.99	D-	60-62.99
C+	77-79.99	F	0-59.99

Notice: I do not round up.

## H. Goals and Outcomes for General Education

This course will meet the following General Education criteria for the Aesthetics Perspective: by (1) identifying the intellectual effects of their interactions with various forms of creative expression, (2) analyzing the conceptual components of various forms of creative expression, (3) interpreting forms of creative expression within various philosophical frameworks, (4) analyzing how products of creative expression reflect, respond to, and shape their social, political, and intellectual contexts, and (5) analyzing how cultural, conceptual and personal aesthetic criteria affect the processes of creation and interpretation.

Upon completion of this course, students will have acquired skills in critical and creative thinking as well as effective communication in the following ways:

### Critical and Creative Thinking

- a. critically analyze philosophical arguments and theories pertaining to the philosophy of literature, film and comics with an emphasis on reducing an argument to its constitutive elements and determining the relevance and strength of those distinct parts.
- b. recognize and identify the ways in which concepts relevant to the philosophy of literature, film and comics are integrated in an argument.
- c. recognize and identify the ways in which individual or cultural perspectives may (or may not) be relevant to the determination of the validity of a philosophical argument, as well as the ways in which individual or cultural perspectives may (or may not) impact upon artistic practice in a way relevant to the philosophy of literature, film and comics.
- d. apply the necessary philosophical techniques for the construction of an argument.
- e. recognize and identify the differences between competing philosophical theories of literature, film and comics.

### Communicating Effectively

- a. articulating and effectively express a philosophically informed argument.
- b. demonstrate their acquisition of the writing skills appropriate to the discipline of philosophy as they pertain to the subject matter.
- c. read comparatively with an eye on integrating techniques and arguments from disparate philosophical traditions, contexts or sub-disciplines as well as relevant areas of the history and theory of literature, film and comics.