

PHL365: Philosophy of Beauty (section 021)

Fall 2009

Instructor: Dr. Glenn Parsons

Location & Time: Monday, 9-11 AMC09 and Friday 1-2 KHS335

Office Hours: Monday 11-12, Thursday 12:30-1:30, or by appointment

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This course is a Lower Level Liberal Studies Elective.
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Course Calendar Description

This course examines classical and contemporary philosophical discussion of questions surrounding beauty and the aesthetic, such as: Can beauty be defined? Are judgements of beauty fundamentally subjective? Does beauty have value, or is it a harmful and oppressive notion? Are humans ‘hard-wired’ to pursue the beautiful?

Course Synopsis and Goals

This course has two aims. One is to introduce you to some main ideas about beauty in the Western philosophical tradition. In the first part of the course, we look at some attempts to describe the essential nature of beauty in general. In the second part of the course, we will focus on some philosophical questions raised by the beauty of particular things, such as landscapes and human beings.

The second and primary aim of the course is to give you a sense of what it is to think philosophically, and to help you develop the ability to think philosophically yourself. Philosophical thinking involves deploying a mixture of creativity, logic and careful analysis to better understand the concepts that figure in complex problems. In this course, you will develop the ability to do this, through a close study of outstanding philosophical texts and through practicing the expression of your own philosophical ideas, in classroom discussions and in your written work.

Course Format/Missed Lecture Notes

This course consists of lectures in the traditional style (note that our one hour Friday class will be used for lectures). In these lectures, I will present the philosophical views developed in the required readings, and then explain, illustrate and provide some criticisms of these views, with an eye toward making them intelligible and relating them to other readings and topics we are considering. I will also encourage the class to ask questions and engage in some critical discussion on the topics and theories that we are covering.

In developing the views presented in the required readings, I will regularly draw on ideas, facts and examples that are not mentioned in those readings, whenever I think it is appropriate and helpful. Please be aware that such material constitutes part of the course content and will be tested on course examinations and assignments. Consequently, having a good set of lecture notes is important in this course. If you miss a lecture, you are responsible for obtaining a copy of the notes for that day. I will not send you a set of lecture notes by email, nor will I post any on our Blackboard page. This is, in part, because I don’t even have a set of lecture notes (what I have are speaker’s notes, which are very different). You may, however, use our

Blackboard page to post requests to borrow other students' lecture notes (but note that the lending of notes by other students is entirely at their own discretion).

Note also that I hold office hours so that students can drop in and ask specific questions about the course material; for obvious reasons I cannot use them to re-present for you a lecture that you have missed. If you ask me to do this, I will tell you to get a copy of the notes; if you then have specific questions about the material, I will be happy to answer them during office hours.

Texts

Some of the texts that we will be reading this term were written by the instructor and are available for downloading on the course Blackboard page (in pdf format). The texts are free but you are responsible for the cost of printing them (should you desire to print them). You also need to purchase one text for this course:

1. A course reader for PHL365 (available at the Ryerson bookstore)

I may also dispense additional readings as photocopies, or employ readings available on the web; such additions will be announced in class and on the course Blackboard page. We may also discuss films relevant to the course topics. If so, I will arrange a screening in class or put copies on reserve in the library.

Contacting Me/Email

I set aside a specific day of the week to answer student emails, so depending on when you email me you may not get an instantaneous response. Email is fine for quick logistical questions, but if you have a substantial question, I recommend that you use the scheduled office hours to come talk to me in person.

Note that, according to Ryerson's academic policy, you are required to use, and to monitor, your Ryerson email account for this course. If I need to contact you regarding any official matters (academic misconduct, changes to the course schedule, e.g.) I will email your Ryerson account, so please check it periodically. Also, you will need to use it for submitting your essays to Turnitin.com. I reserve the right not to respond to non-Ryerson email addresses (e.g. yahoo, hotmail, etc.) and my junk mail filters may delete such messages. For information on how to activate your Ryerson email account, go to:

<http://www.ryerson.ca/ccs/myaccounts/activate/index.html>.

Important Dates

- Monday October 12th is Thanksgiving holiday; so **class and office hours are cancelled**.
- I will be away from October 21st to 23rd, so **there is no lecture on Friday October 23rd**. However, someone will be present in our usual location to collect hard copies of the first essay.
- The last day to drop a course (no refund of fees) is Friday November 13th.
- The Faculty Course Survey will be administered in class on Monday November 23rd.
- Classes end Friday December 4th but....
- on Friday, December 4th, 2009 undergrad classes regularly scheduled on Fridays will be replaced with classes regularly scheduled on Mondays. Therefore, **we have a two hour class from 9:00-11:00 on Friday December 4th, in AMC09**.

For a full listing of significant dates go to <http://www.ryerson.ca/calendar/2009-2010/pg12.html>

Course Blackboard Page

This course has a Blackboard page, which you should be able to access through <http://my.ryerson.ca>. Various announcements will be posted there periodically, along with certain class material and, at my discretion, grades. Also note that the authoritative version of the class schedule will be the one on the Blackboard page, and if you are missing class you should check it periodically for updates.

Evaluation

Grades will be calculated as follows:

	<i>Due Date</i>	<i>Value</i>
Assignment (use one sheet of paper, maximum)	Thursday, October 1 st (week 4)	20%
Short Essay #1 (4-6 pages) (Topic: TBA)	Thursday October 22 nd (week 7)	30%
Short Essay #2 (4-6 pages) (Topic: TBA)	During the final exam period, date to be announced	50%

- Assignment/Essay Submission. To submit your assignments and essays, you must do two things:
 1. Before the deadline, upload an electronic copy to the Blackboard site (it will automatically be submitted to the Turnitin.com plagiarism detection service (see 'Course Policies' below for further information).
 2. The day after the deadline, submit a hard copy. Either submit it to me in class, or drop it in the Philosophy drop box on the 4th floor of Jorgensen Hall.

Important Notes:

- The official time of submission, for purposes of calculating late penalties, is the time that you upload the electronic version. So we will collect your hard copy the day after the deadline....BUT REMEMBER that your work will not be graded unless and until you submit a hard copy for us to mark.
 - The electronic and print versions that you submit must contain identical text. If they do not match absolutely, I will reject your submission. DO NOT change your essay once it has been electronically submitted.
 - DO NOT slip hard copies under my door, leave them my mailbox, and so forth -- I will not take responsibility if they get lost.
- Late Penalties. Assignments/essays are due on Blackboard by 11:00 pm on the date indicated; work received after this time is late. The penalty for late submission is one letter grade per day (e.g. an A+ paper submitted one day late receives an A, a C- paper two days late receives a D, and so on), including

weekend days, up to a maximum of seven days. Papers that are more than seven days late will receive a grade of zero. **There are no exceptions to these deadlines** unless there are documented medical or compassionate grounds for an extension (see ‘Course Policies’ below).

- There is no make-up or bonus work for this course.
- The first assignment will be returned to the class before the first essay is due.
- Work will not be returned to anyone except the author (that is, your friend cannot pick up your essay for you).
- Final essay grades will be posted on Blackboard.
- Grades for work during the term may, or may not, be posted on the course Blackboard page, at the instructor’s discretion. Students who do not wish to have their grades posted in this manner must notify the instructor in writing during the first two weeks of class.
- Ryerson’s academic policy states that “students will receive their final course grades only from the Registrar. Final course grades may not be posted or disclosed anywhere by an instructor” (<http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/pol145-fall2009.pdf>). This means that I cannot, under any circumstances, email, or report to you in any other way, your final grade in this course.

A Note about the Coursework

The aim of this course is to help you learn to think philosophically, and I will assess this by grading your attempts to address philosophical questions in your assignments, essays and exams. Certain features are characteristic of good philosophical thinking and writing, and I will discuss them, show you examples of them, and help you learn to cultivate them in your own writing. Your work will be evaluated on how well it manifests these features (see description of letter grades below). However, there is no simple recipe for achieving these qualities in your written work that I, or anyone else, can give you. Good philosophical thinking is not primarily a matter of producing a particular set of statements that constitutes the ‘right answer’ to a question, nor is it a matter of applying a certain formula or recipe. Doing philosophy well is not, in other words, a ‘paint-by-numbers’ activity; it is a skill, something more of an art than a science.

Consider an analogy. Some novels are insightful, and this is generally apparent to readers. To the extent that a novel has this quality, it is a good novel. But there is no formula for writing an insightful novel: this can be done in any number of ways depending on just what one is writing about, how one approaches it, and so on. The ability to write insightful novels, though perhaps natural to some extent, is also a skill that one develops through studying good novels, identifying the general features of insightful fiction, and refining one’s judgement through practice. This is very similar to what we will be doing in this course with regard to writing and thinking philosophically.

This means that it is particularly important that you take note of the feedback that we give you on your written work over the course of the term. If you do poorly on the assignment on philosopher X, don’t simply forget about it and resolve to devote more effort to philosopher Y for the next assignment. For the assignments do not simply test the effort that you have put into philosopher X or Y; rather they test *your philosophical skills*, and the way to improve these skills is to take note of our comments and criticisms before launching your next effort.

Description of Letter Grades

The following is a general description of the meaning of the various letter grades, as we understand them. The term in brackets following each grade is the meaning of that grade according to Ryerson's official policy on grading ([academic council policy #46](#)).

- *A Grade (excellent) work.* Papers at this level are very well organized; they display a clear thesis and a clear aim, and carry that aim off well. They display well-rounded understanding of the issues and concepts deployed and show the ability to analyze and synthesize complex ideas. Arguments are clear and cogent and do not merely repeat arguments or ideas discussed in class notes or texts. Few or no errors are made, and possible responses are anticipated and dealt with in a highly effective way. Papers at this level reflect a deep and thorough grasp of the issues and manifest enough argumentative skill to compel a sceptical reader to accept the thesis offered.
- *B Grade (good) work.* Papers at the B level are well organized: they have a thesis and provide cogent arguments for that thesis. B level papers, however, may contain arguments that are not as original or as sharply presented as those in A papers. Minor errors in the treatment of ideas or concepts may appear, but no serious errors are present. Analysis of ideas and concepts may be sloppy or inaccurate in places. Some obvious objections may remain unaddressed, leaving the whole less than convincing to a sceptical reader. Overall, these papers are good but some work remains to take the paper to the A level.
- *C Grade (satisfactory) work.* Papers at this level present a coherent and relevant argument, but display more problems than B level papers, such as an unclear thesis, difficulties with overall organization, unclear or ambiguous argument or substantial errors in the presentation of ideas. Demonstration of the ability to analyze and synthesize complex ideas may be lacking, and the paper may need to be better informed in light of the course material. Overall, a paper at this level displays a grasp of the issues but needs work in one or more areas to reach the B level.
- *D Grade (marginal) work.* Papers at this level have one or more serious problems. For example, they may be poorly organized, lack a discernible thesis, or present basic concepts inaccurately. Papers at this level tend to drift rather than flow: the reader may have trouble following whole sections of the paper, or in seeing how the different sections together into a coherent whole.
- *F Grade (unsatisfactory) work.* Papers that receive an F are generally uninformed (displaying only rudimentary familiarity with the issues and concepts discussed in the course), incoherent, or both.

Concerns about Grades

Concerns about grades will be handled through a five-step procedure, based on and consistent with Ryerson's Academic Policy #134, Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals. For further information, consult this policy, which is available at <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol134.pdf>.

1. Student meets with the instructor. The first step is to meet with me to discuss the grade in person. You cannot request a re-grade until and unless we have held such a meeting. This meeting must take place within ten working days of the return of the graded assignment to the class. If you can't make my office hours, contact me by email to arrange a time for this meeting.

2. Student requests a re-grade by email. If, after this meeting, the student wishes to request a re-grade, he or she must do so by emailing his or her concerns about the grade to me. I will accept requests for re-grading only if students have specific concerns regarding our original comments (Policy #134, article IC1b). An example of a specific concern is: “The marker wrote on my essay that I failed to mention philosopher X, but on page six I talked about him for two paragraphs.” The following are not specific concerns about our comments: “I thought I did better”, “My roommate felt this was an A paper”, “I always get an A”, or “The TA marked my essay” (see the note about TA grading, below). Note that any email requests for re-grading made before meeting with the instructor, or more than ten working days after work has been returned to the class, will be denied.

3. Instructor re-grades. If I decide that the student has provided specific concerns about the original grade, I will re-grade the work. The mark I give becomes the official grade, whether it is higher or lower than the original mark. In other words, a re-grade is precisely that: a reconsideration of the work. It is not necessarily the assignment of a higher grade (Policy #134, article ICi).

4. Student requests department/program re-grade. If the student is not satisfied with the instructor’s re-grading, or with the instructor’s decision not to re-grade a piece work, the student can ask the relevant department chair or program director to have another qualified instructor re-grade the work. Please note that the student “must submit specific and detailed reasons, in writing to the Chair/Director, as to why the original grade was inappropriate, including any evidence from course notes, textbooks, etc. Asserting that the work deserves more marks or that the student disagrees with the mark is not sufficient support for the reassessment” (Policy #134 IC1fi).

5. Chair/Director decides. The Chair/Director may decide to have another qualified instructor re-grade the work, or he/she may refuse the request. This decision is final. If the work is re-graded, we will provide all relevant information on the assignment, as well as any marking key or specific grading criteria employed, to the designated instructor. The new grade assigned may be higher, lower, or the same as than the original grade, and this grade is final.

A Note on TA Grading

Sometimes I am asked to personally re-grade a paper solely on the grounds that it was marked by a TA. All such requests will be refused. I monitor all TA grading for consistency. In other words, no work will receive a lower grade in my course because it was graded by a TA.

A Note on Appeals

Please note that requests for re-grading are *not* academic appeals, as that phrase is defined in Ryerson’s Academic Policy. “Academic Appeals are reserved for issues related to grades or academic standings that could not be resolved with an instructor or a Chair/Director... The grounds for academic appeals are “Prejudice; Medical; Compassionate; Course Management; and Procedural Error” (Policy #134 IIB). For further information on academic appeals, see Policy #134, as well as Ryerson’s *Student Guide to Avoiding Academic Appeals* (<http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/guideavoidappeals.pdf>)

Course Policies

Attendance and Conduct in the Classroom

Ryerson's Student Code of Non-academic Conduct (Policy #61) states that "the University has an obligation to maintain safe and suitable conditions for learning." Philosophy is an activity that requires concentration. So, this policy obligates me to ensure that all students who wish to do so can concentrate on the lecture material. Students are reminded that attendance is not mandatory in this course. Those who distract their peers by overly loud conversations or other activities will be asked to keep it down. If the disruption persists, offenders will be asked to leave. If I have to ask you to leave, you cannot return to class until I receive a note from your program director asking that you be readmitted (see Policy #61.F.1).

Alternate Arrangements for Missed Exams and Assignments

- In general, **circumstances interfering with your ability to perform required course work must be brought to my attention as they arise, and if at all possible, in advance of missed work.** Requests made at the end of term for extensions, rewrites, etc. due to ongoing personal circumstances will not be considered (for more information, see Ryerson's [Student Guide to Avoiding Academic Appeals](#)). Alternate arrangements for missed exams and assignments will normally be granted **ONLY** for reasons of illness or injury, religious observance, disability and compassionate grounds (see below).
- Alternate Arrangements/Extensions will NOT be granted for the following reasons:
 - Computer failure, loss of work (keep a backup copy of all your work)
 - Social engagements, including family-related events
 - Work schedules
 - Coincident deadlines in other courses
 - Travel other than home-to-school commuting (holidays, cancelled flights, *e.g.*)
- Requests for alternate arrangements will be considered in the following cases:
 1. *Illness/Injury.* Students must provide, within three working days of the missed deadline (or as soon as medically feasible), a completed Ryerson Medical Certificate or a letter from a physician (on letterhead) with the student declaration portion of the Ryerson Medical Certificate attached (this form can be obtained at <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/medical.pdf>). The nature of the alternate arrangement for making up the missing grade is left to the discretion of the instructor. For further details, refer to Ryerson Academic Policy 134, Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals, available at www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol134.pdf.
 2. *Religious Observance.* Ryerson policy allows accommodation for religious observances. Requests for such accommodation must be made no later than two weeks prior to the conflict in question and preferably should be made during the first two weeks of class. For the appropriate forms and instructions, see <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/reobservforminstr.pdf>. Ryerson's full policy on Accommodation of Student Religious Observance Obligations is available at <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol150-fall2009.pdf>
 3. *Disability.* Students with a diagnosed physical or learning disability should register with the Ryerson Access Centre at the start of the term. For more information, visit their website at <http://www.ryerson.ca/accesscentre/>

4. *Compassionate Grounds*. Students unable to complete assignments due to loss of a family member or loved one, or due to personal difficulties that are interfering with their studies, should speak to the instructors as soon as is possible. The instructor reserves the right to require documentation, depending upon the circumstances.

Academic Misconduct and Turnitin.com

- Students are reminded that they are required to adhere to all relevant University policies, such as the Student Code of Academic Conduct (available online at: <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol60.pdf>). This code treats plagiarism (the misrepresentation of someone else's work as your own) as a form of academic misconduct. For detailed information concerning academic misconduct and the relevant penalties, see the Student Code. Note that **the instructor will be distributing information specifying the required citation practices for assignments in this course, and that you are responsible for being aware of and employing this information**. Note also **that it is your responsibility to be aware of what constitutes plagiarism**, and that ignorance of this is not an acceptable excuse. For further information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, go to Ryerson's Academic Integrity website (www.ryerson.ca/ai). This site contains tutorials and quizzes to help you learn about various types of misconduct, as well as a brief guide to avoiding plagiarism (<http://www.ryerson.ca/ai/students/studentplagiarism.html>)
- Ryerson University subscribes to Turnitin.com, an on-line service that evaluates the originality of written work. Students agree that by taking this course, they are aware that all required papers will 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. Detailed instructions on submitting written work to Turnitin will be provided. Note that you are required to use an official Ryerson email account when submitting to Turnitin.com: assignments from other email addresses (yahoo, *e.g.*) will not be accepted. In accordance with Ryerson's academic policy, students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must, by the end of the second week of classes, consult with the instructor to make alternate arrangements. Also, students should be aware that "when an instructor has a reason to suspect that an individual piece of work has been plagiarized, the instructor shall be permitted to submit that work to any plagiarism detection service", including Turnitin.com. For more information, see Ryerson's Course Management Policy, Section 4.3.a, available at <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/pol145-fall2009.pdf>.
- Students should be aware that the instructor reserves the right to conduct an oral examination on the contents of any submitted assignment.
- Note that Ryerson's Examination policy prohibits the bringing of any electronic device, such as a cell phone, PDA, or other such device, into a test or examination. This policy will be enforced in this course.

Readings for PHL365: The Philosophy of Beauty

Please Note:

- At each lecture, students will be expected to have read the indicated readings beforehand.
- Readings marked with an asterisk are available for download, in pdf format, on our Blackboard page; all other readings are in the course reader.

Part I: The Nature of Beauty

- *Dialogues on Beauty, First Day (Subjectivism)
 - *Dialogues on Beauty, Second Day (Object Theories)
 - *Dialogues on Beauty, Third Day (The Intensity Theory)
 - *Dialogues on Beauty, Fourth Day (Disinterestedness)
- David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"
- *Dialogues on Beauty, Sixth Day (The True Judges)

Part II: Nature

- Allen Carlson, "Appreciation and the Natural Environment"
- Thomas Heyd, "Aesthetic Appreciation and the Many Stories about Nature"

Part III: Persons

- Zebrowitz, *Reading Faces*, ch. 6 & 7 ("Analyzing Attractiveness")
- Naomi Wolf, Introduction from *The Beauty Myth*
- Anita Silvers, "From the Crooked Timber of Humanity, Beautiful Things Can be Made"
- *Glenn Parsons, "Universal Beauty?"