

**Philosophy 16: Philosophy Through Popular Culture**  
**Mount Saint Mary's University**  
**Fall 2016**

	<b>Chalon campus</b>	<b>Doheny campus</b>
<b>Course number</b>	PHI_016_4_16/FA	PHI_016_D1_16/FA
<b>Day/Time/location</b>	MW/1:20- 2:50PM/Chalon <b>TBD</b>	TTH/9:40- 11:10AM/Doheny <b>TBD</b>
<b>Office hours day/time/location</b>	#H320/ <b>TBD/TBD</b>	Building 2, Room 209/ <b>TBD/TBD</b>

**Course website**

available on [Canvas](#)

**Instructor Information**

Dr. Philip J. Walsh

Email: [pwalsh@msmu.edu](mailto:pwalsh@msmu.edu)

Office: #H320 (Chalon) / Building 2, Room 209 (Doheny)

**Catalog Description**

This is an introduction to philosophical ideas and methods that explores the ways in which we can learn about – and do – philosophy through popular culture. We will draw from a variety of sources – such as movies, TV, social media, journalism, art, literature, music, and advertising. You will get a good overview of the discipline while seeing the ways philosophical themes, concepts, and ideas are expressed in popular culture. GS-VBI, VI. Note: Effective Fall 2014 students can get GS credit for only one, PHI 15 or PHI 16 – not both.

**Course Overview**

Philosophy is both a method for thinking well and a historical tradition of texts and ideas. This course will introduce both aspects by focusing on various examples of popular culture such as film, music, painting and photography, advertising, and popular nonfiction. First, we will orient ourselves to the philosopher's toolkit by practicing critical thinking and examining what makes an argument logically valid. Next, we will try to figure out what popular culture *is* and *why it matters* by reading what some famous philosophers have said about music and the visual arts. How does popular culture affect us and how do we influence popular culture? We will investigate how the concepts of race and gender help us answer, or perhaps complicate, these questions. Finally, we examine how new media technologies – namely the internet and social media – are changing popular culture.

**Learning Objectives**

The main objective for this course is for each student to become “philosophically reflective”—that is, able to deepen her self-understanding by reflecting on her own experience in the light of the philosophical ideas we are studying. Another way of expressing this course objective is that each student will work on developing a coherent worldview. In order to achieve this goal, this course has the following objectives for each student:

- to understand some of the major philosophical ideas that have shaped different philosophical traditions.
- to be able to analyze the philosophical framework and presuppositions of cultural expressions of popular philosophical views.
- to develop proficiency in the skills and methods of philosophy, especially critical reading and writing.
- to be able to use what she has learned about philosophy to deepen her self-understanding and bring consistency to her worldview.

### **Required texts and assigned viewings**

Plato, *Republic*

2nd edition (1992)

Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

**ISBN-13:** 978-0872201361

**ISBN-10:** 0872201368

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

Reprint edition (1990)

Penguin Books

**ISBN-10:** 0140135154

**ISBN-13:** 978-0140135152

Ta-nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

1st edition (2015)

Spiegel & Grau

**ISBN-10:** 0812993543

**ISBN-13:** 978-0812993547

*The Truman Show* (1998)

*Her* (2013)

Students are responsible for viewing the films on their own time. Both films are available on either Netflix, Amazon video, or iTunes for rent or purchase.

Additional readings and viewing content will be made available online.

### **Methods of Evaluation**

1. In-class quizzes 20%
2. Midterm exam 25%
3. Final exam 25%
4. Paper 25%
5. Group presentation 5%

### **Grading scale**

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D	60-69
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	F	<60
B+	87-89	C	73-76		
B	83-86	C-	70-72		

### **Class policies**

“A friend is one before whom I may think aloud” –Emerson

My fundamental policy in this class is to have a class environment of mutual respect where we help one another achieve our course objective. The course policies in this section are designed to help achieve that environment.

### **Cell phones, text messaging, and other distractions**

Our classroom is not a suitable place for a ringing cell phone or to check your text messages. Even for a world-class multi-tasker like you, these activities are a distraction from our class activities. In addition, our classroom is not an appropriate place to work on homework for other classes or other outside projects. Here’s a good rule to follow: If the instructor wouldn’t do it, then a student shouldn’t do it either.

### **Attendance**

Success in this course highly depends on regular attendance. You will not receive points simply for showing up, but attendance is incentivized through short, relatively easy reading quizzes. (I say “relatively easy” because they will only be easy if you actually do the reading.) Furthermore, if you miss a class and fail to provide official documentation (a doctor’s note, etc.) you will not be given the opportunity to make up anything you missed, e.g. a quiz. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to inquire after anything you may have missed.

### **Late work policy**

Late work will be penalized one full letter grade per day late.

### **Required Readings and Viewings**

You should complete the assigned reading or viewing on the course schedule *before* class meets. My personal advice is to complete the reading before class and write down questions you have or things you don’t understand. After class, go back and review the reading once more.

### **Quizzes**

I give frequent short (about 5 minutes to complete) and easy (just summary, no interpretation) in-class pop quizzes on the reading assignments. These quizzes will be easy if you do the reading. I drop the two lowest quiz grades for the semester. If you miss a quiz due to *unexcused* lateness or absence, you receive a zero for that quiz.

### **Writing a philosophy paper**

You will write one 7-8 page paper for this course, which will be broken into two stages. Writing is difficult and takes practice. We will discuss different aspects of writing well in class, so this is another reason attendance is important. We will also look at writing samples and discuss what they do well and where they fail. Both the content and the

mechanics (grammar, spelling, syntax, structure, punctuation, etc.) will factor into how I grade your writing. An “A” paper is an “excellent” paper, and an excellent paper cannot have sloppy mechanical errors. We will discuss the writing assignment in more detail on a separate handout.

### **Exams**

There will be a midterm and final exam consisting of short answer questions (a few sentences) and essay questions (a few pages). See our course schedule below for exam dates.

### **Group Presentation**

You will be divided into six roughly equal groups during the first week of class. Each group will sign up for topic on the course schedule. Groups will make a 5-10 minute presentation on their assigned topic. We will cover the group presentation assignment in more detail on a separate handout.

### **Academic difficulty**

This may be your first philosophy class, and/or you may find the topic challenging and difficult. If you do have difficulties, the only way to address it is to actively seek help. Ask questions in class, see me before or after class, talk to me in my office or at the LRC, e-mail me, set up a time to meet, or all of the above. I’m here to help, but the best help comes from constant interaction. *Do not wait until the last minute to get help!*

### **Academic honesty**

As a member of this class you are also a member of the community of scholars. As a scholar, your fundamental commitment is to truth, and academic integrity is an important part of that commitment. Academic dishonesty undermines the integrity of the educational process and cannot be tolerated. Thus, the college has developed the following “Statement On Academic Integrity” which I fully endorse.

Cheating of any kind is dishonest. This includes copying others’ essays or exams, stealing exams, buying or otherwise procuring new or used exams, paying someone else to take an exam or write an essay for which you take credit, and any other way you might receive credit for work that is not your own.

Using one essay for two different classes is also dishonest. If you have a topic appropriate for two classes, original and separate work must be done for each class.

Plagiarism is also an act of academic dishonesty. It is a serious academic offense. Plagiarism is using anyone else’s ideas and representing them as your own (i.e., not giving appropriate credit). Acts of plagiarism include the following:

- Failure to document and give credit to an original source
- Paraphrasing another person’s ideas without giving credit
- Using direct quotations without proper recognition of the source
- Using statistics, facts, or information from a source other than your own original research (i.e., not your own) without credit.

When in doubt, give credit. Submitting work (even work completed by a team or

group) containing material not properly credited is a serious academic offense and a violation of the very principles of academic integrity. Every individual is ultimately responsible for ensuring the honesty and integrity of any academic or scholarly work bearing her name.

**Academic freedom**

As a member of the community of scholars, you not only have the duty of academic integrity, but the right of academic freedom—including the right to reasonably disagree with your instructors without being penalized for this disagreement. For more information on the academic freedom which is yours as a student, see the *Student Handbook*.

**Students with disabilities**

MSMU, in compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of disability. If you are a student with a documented disability, please see Mr. Mark Forte, Director of Learning Resource Center, to make arrangements for classroom accommodations. His office is located in Building 3 in the Learning Resource Center. Additional disability related information and policies can be found in the Student Handbook on pages 12 and 27.

**Course Schedule** (subject to change at discretion of instructor)

8/22	Week 1.1	Introduction to course/overview of major themes/introduction to critical thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Course syllabus</li> <li>- Group project assigned</li> </ul>
	Week 1.2	Critical Thinking and Advertisements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teays: <i>Second Thoughts</i>, pp. 39-49 (Canvas)</li> </ul>
8/29	Week 2.1	Critical Thinking and Advertisements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teays: <i>Second Thoughts</i>, pp. 53-58 (Canvas)</li> <li>- Essay part 1 assigned</li> </ul>
	Week 2.2	Culture and Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plato: <i>Republic</i>, Book 2 (pp. 32-59)</li> </ul>
9/5	Week 3.1	Culture and Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plato: <i>Republic</i>, Book 3 (pp. 60-93)</li> </ul>
	Week 3.2	Climbing out of the Cave <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plato: <i>Republic</i>, Book 7 (pp. 186-212)</li> <li>- Assigned viewing: <i>The Truman Show</i></li> </ul>
9/12	Week 4.1	Plato and the Mass Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plato: <i>Republic</i>, Book 10 (pp. 264-292)</li> <li>- Assigned viewing: <i>The Truman Show</i></li> </ul>

	Week 4.2	Plato and the Mass Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nehamas: “<u>Plato’s Pop Culture Problem</u>” (online)</li> <li>- Assigned viewing: <i>The Truman Show</i></li> </ul>
9/19	Week 5.1	Ideology and Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Marx &amp; Engels: “Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas” (Canvas)</li> <li>- Marx: “Base and Superstructure” (Canvas)</li> </ul>
	Week 5.2	Ideology and Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engels: “Letter to Joseph Bloch” (Canvas)</li> <li>- <u>Zizek on ideology in film</u> (online)</li> <li>- Essay part 1 due</li> </ul>
9/26	Week 6.1	Can we rescue popular culture? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shusterman: “Form and Funk: the aesthetic challenge of popular art” (Canvas)</li> </ul>
	Week 6.2	Activism in Popular Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assigned viewing: Beyoncé <i>Formation</i> music video (online)</li> <li>- London: “<u>Beyoncé’s capitalism, masquerading as radical change</u>” (online)</li> </ul>
10/3	Week 7.1	Recap/Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Groups presentations (1-3)</li> <li>- Essay part 2 assigned</li> </ul>
	Week 7.2	Midterm
10/10	Week 8.1	Art in the age of mechanical reproduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Berger: <i>Ways of Seeing</i>, pp. 7-33</li> <li>- Pop art: from Warhol to Banksy and Shepard Fairey (in class)</li> </ul>
	Week 8.2	Art in the age of mechanical reproduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Berger: <i>Ways of Seeing</i>, pp. 129-155</li> <li>- Pop art: from Warhol to Banksy and Shepard Fairey (in class)</li> </ul>
10/17	Week 9.1	The male gaze, the female body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Berger: <i>Ways of Seeing</i>, pp. 35-64</li> </ul>
	Week 9.2	The male gaze, the female body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “<u>The Hawkeye Initiative Redraws Absurd Superheroine Poses with Hawkeye</u>” (online)</li> </ul>
10/24	Week 10.1	Gender as performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Judith Butler for beginners” (online handout)</li> <li>- “<u>Is Gender Real?</u>” (youtube)</li> </ul>
	Week 10.2	Reclaiming the gaze

		- <u>“The Selfie as a Feminist Act”</u> (online)
10/31	Week 11.1	Having a body that is not your own - Coates: <i>Between the World and Me</i> , pp.
	Week 11.2	Consciousness and questions of identity - Coates: <i>Between the World and Me</i> , pp.
11/7	Week 12.1	Fate and freedom to choose - Coates: <i>Between the World and Me</i> , pp.
	Week 12.2	Social justice in the age of social media - <u>“How Black Lives Matter Uses Social Media to Fight the Power”</u> (online) - Essay part 2 due
11/14	Week 13.1	What is technology? - Selection from <i>Heidegger for Beginners</i> (Canvas)
	Week 13.2	What does technology want? - <u>“How Technology Evolves”</u> (online viewing)
11/21	Week 14.1	Technology: promise or peril? - Assigned viewing: <i>Her</i> (2013)
	Week 14.2	Technology: promise or peril? - Assigned viewing: <i>Her</i> (2013)
11/28	Week 15.1	Recap/Review - Group presentations (4-6)
	Week 15.2	Recap/Review
12/5	Final exam	