

Humanities 4: Modern Currents in the Humanities

Shimer College

Fall 2015

pi Classroom

MWF, 11:45-3:15

Instructor: Adam Kotsko
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Course Description

As both a continuation and a culmination of the Humanities sequence, this course aims to introduce students to critical perspectives on the humanities while continuing to broaden and deepen students' knowledge of the fine arts, literature, philosophy, and religious thought, focusing primarily on works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A guiding thread throughout is a focus on works that are critical or reflective, both within and across disciplines. Students should be prepared for readings in this course to be in dialogue with readings from previous Humanities courses and with each other.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge/Communication

- Explain the distinctive approach and contribution of Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and other modern thinkers to humanistic study.
- Distinguish among several of the major modern intellectual movements in the humanities.
- Define and use the complex vocabulary and key concepts adopted by contemporary humanist discourse.
- Explain the status of ambiguity in contemporary humanist discourse.
- Communicate ideas on texts clearly and effectively in discussion and in writing.
- Restate accurately someone else's point of view on course topics.
- Participate effectively in discussion by asking genuine questions, listening carefully to answers, and thoughtfully answering others' questions.

Critical Thinking/Application

- Assess and identify the complex innovations undertaken by modern works of visual art, music and literature.
- Employ works of criticism that critique humanistic scholarship and art.
- Evaluate works that often disrespectfully challenge accepted norms of argumentation and presentation.
- Formulate how parody, perversion, inversion and subversion creates unexpected cross-disciplinary comparison.
- Explain and use the complex vocabulary of contemporary humanistic discourse.

Collaboration/Ethics

- Engage collaboratively to learn the difficult technical vocabulary of contemporary humanist discourse.
- Engage seriously and respectfully with works that actively challenge accepted norms of argumentation and presentation.

Required Texts

Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity* (Citadel)

Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Kaufmann (Touchstone)

Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim* (Columbia UP)

James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Orbis)

Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. Krell (Harper Collins)

Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Cambridge UP)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. Kaufmann (Modern Library)

Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Picador)

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Wiley)

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Oxford)

We will also use the *Norton Anthology of Poetry*, which you should have from Hum 2 or IS3-4. If you did not receive or retain that volume, the relevant sections will be photocopied and distributed in class as needed. Other readings will be provided in a course packet and are marked as such on the syllabus: (**).

Access to Fine Art Materials

To have easy access to the fine arts materials discussed in class, students will need to use two free online services: Google Drive (included in your Shimer Google account) and Spotify (a music streaming service). I will share a Google Drive folder containing the visual artworks and Spotify playlists containing the music.

Student Assessment

Each student's grade depends on demonstrating the qualities listed in the learning outcomes above. Class discussion and written work will serve as the means of demonstrating progress toward those outcomes, with each area representing 50% of the final grade.

Discussion assumes conscientious preparation for and prompt attendance at each class. Bring questions to class, and come ready to listen to others and share your ideas with one another in a respectful, attentive, and caring way. You should read all texts thoroughly, annotating or taking notes. This course will follow the standard Shimer attendance policy—more than three absences will put you in danger of failing the course, and each absence will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

For discussions of music, I recommend that students get in the habit of listening to the shared Spotify playlists in order to gain a general familiarity and comfort with the music; then, closer to the day they will be discussed, students should listen to them at least twice in a concentrated, distraction-free way, taking notes so that they can give some kind of narrative account of what happens in the piece using the basic vocabulary gained in Humanities 1 (for example: "it starts

very quietly, then suddenly swells into a strange, dissonant chord,” or “it begins with a solo flute playing a kind of hypnotic melody,” etc.).

Written work will take two forms. The first will be a number of **analytical summaries** over individual readings. These summaries are intended to be notably different from “protokolls” or “focus statements” for other classes. Rather than attempting to spur conversation or offer one’s own observations or reflections, the goal of an analytical summary is to provide an accurate and reliable account of the reading that would be useful for review purposes or for preparing to write a paper.

In all cases, analytical summaries must include at least five key quotations from the reading, properly cited. For argumentative readings, they should give the reader a sense of the basic steps in the argument, highlighting important concepts and definitions. For literary readings, they should provide a brief plot summary (if applicable) and point out important themes, images, and stylistic features. These categories are not mutually exclusive—some readings may display both argumentative and literary features, and both should be addressed.

Summaries must be at least one and not more than two *single-spaced* pages (i.e., the front and back of a printed page). They must be distributed to the professor and the entire class via e-mail, following the formatting stipulations listed below, *before* the class session in which they are to be delivered. (Printed copies are permissible but not encouraged, especially if printing will delay your arrival in class.)

The ultimate goal of this assignment is for the class to collaboratively generate a set of reliable notes over all the class readings, to aid in the digestion of the material and to help all students get started on their papers. As such, students may be required to revise their summaries if the professor and students agree that they reflect serious inaccuracies or omissions, regardless of their grade. Finalized summaries will be collected in a shared Google Drive folder and will constitute the reading assignment for certain class sessions, as listed below.

Summaries will be graded with an augmented pass/fail system including high and low pass. Papers receiving a low pass or failing grade *must* be rewritten; papers receiving a straight pass *may* be rewritten for a higher grade. If you do not submit and deliver a summary on the day assigned, you will receive a failing grade **and that day will count as an absence**. Late summaries may be submitted up to the class session *before* the relevant review day for a maximum grade of a pass (no high passes); after that point, there is no making up for them.

The exact number of analytical summaries required will depend on enrollment in the class but will not exceed three. (The professor will provide analytical summaries for all readings not assigned to a student.)

Students will also be required to write a **comparative paper** in which they must choose two works that are in significantly different genres or disciplines from among those covered in the Shimer Humanities sequence (visual art, music, film, poetry, drama, fiction, philosophy, or theology) but share some clear commonality in topic, theme, or outlook and compare and contrast them. Students should give particular attention to the contribution of the works’

respective forms to their treatment of their subject matter and what this might tell us about the possibilities and limitations inherent to their respective genres or disciplines.

The class's collaborative work on the analytical summaries is intended to contribute to each student's preparation for this paper. In addition, each student will be required to submit a brief prospectus for their paper, of no more than one single-spaced page, detailing the works they intend to compare, the basis for this comparison, and important quotes (or salient details, for non-textual works) from each work. Failure to submit a good-faith effort at this prospectus by the deadline listed on the course section will result in the loss of a full letter grade off the final paper grade (i.e., the maximum attainable grade for an excellent paper will be a B+). Any topic changes after submission of the prospectus require explicit approval of the instructor, or else a further reduction of a half letter grade will result.

Papers must follow a **recognized documentation style** in the humanities—preferably University of Chicago or MLA—and be **between 1800 and 2400 words** (six and eight pages) in length, double-spaced, in a standard font. **All papers must be submitted via e-mail, using a Microsoft Word or LibreOffice-compatible format (.doc, .docx, .rtf, .odt) or Google Drive.** Please do not submit papers in PDF or Pages formats. If you submit a printed copy by the deadline, your paper will be treated as on time, but you will **NOT** receive a grade or any comments until an appropriately formatted electronic version is submitted.

Comparative papers are due at the end of the semester, which excludes the possibility of a rewrite. I will comment on drafts, however, with the deadline to be determined through in-class dialogue toward the end of the semester.

The analytical summaries (taken together) and comparative paper will each represent **50% of your writing grade, or 25% of your final grade.**

Class and Reading Schedule

Monday	August 24	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , chs. 1 and 2 (pp. 7-73)
Wednesday	August 26	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics</i> , ch. 3, §§1-3 (pp. 74-115)
Friday	August 28	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics</i> , ch. 3, §§4-5, conclusion (pp. 115-160)
Monday	August 31	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , author's preface, §§1-83
Wednesday	September 2	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§84-166
Friday	September 4	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§167-250
Monday	September 7	LABOR DAY—No class
Wednesday	September 9	Kant, <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i> , Preface, §§1-4
Friday	September 11	Kant, <i>Prolegomena</i> , §§5-21 (skip notes after 13)
Monday	September 14	Kant, <i>Prolegomena</i> , §§40-56
Wednesday	September 16	Kant, <i>Prolegomena</i> , §§57-60, Solution

Friday	September 18	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Preface, “On the Prejudices of the Philosophers” (<i>Basic Writings</i> , pp. 192-222)
Monday	September 21	Nietzsche, <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> (<i>Basic Writings</i> , pp. 31-52); Wagner, “Prelude to <i>Tristan and Isolde</i> ” (“Music for Nietzsche” Spotify list)
Wednesday	September 23	Nietzsche, <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> (<i>Basic Writings</i> , pp. 52-76); Debussy, “Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun” (“Music for Nietzsche” Spotify list)
Friday	September 25	Nietzsche, <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> (<i>Basic Writings</i> , pp. 76-98); Schoenberg, <i>Piano Pieces</i> (“Music for Nietzsche” Spotify list)
Monday	September 28	Butler, <i>Antigone’s Claim</i> , ch. 1
Wednesday	September 30	Butler, <i>Antigone’s Claim</i> , ch. 2
Friday	October 2	Butler, <i>Antigone’s Claim</i> , ch. 3
Monday	October 5	Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art” (<i>Basic Writings</i> , pp. 140-165); visual artworks in Google Drive folder under “Art Day 1”
Wednesday	October 7	Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art” (<i>Basic Writings</i> , pp. 165-182); visual artworks in Google Drive folder under “Art Day 2”
Friday	October 9	Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art” (<i>Basic Writings</i> , pp. 182-206); visual artworks in Google Drive folder under “Art Day 3”
Monday	October 12	Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Radical Mountain” (**); Schuyler, “The Negro Art Hokum” (**); Locke, “The New Negro” (**); artwork in class
Wednesday	October 14	Langston Hughes section of <i>Norton Anthology of Poetry</i> ; “Harlem Renaissance” Spotify list
Friday	October 16	Review day—read all analytical summaries thus far and be prepared to discuss all past materials
Monday	October 19	DEAN’S BREAK—No class
Wednesday	October 21	Woolf, <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> , pp. 3-48
Friday	October 23	Woolf, <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> , pp. 48-100
Monday	October 26	Woolf, <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> , pp. 100-151
Wednesday	October 28	Woolf, <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> , pp. 151-end
Friday	October 30	Sontag, <i>On Photography</i> , pp. 3-48
Monday	November 2	Sontag, <i>On Photography</i> , pp. 51-112
Wednesday	November 4	Sontag, <i>On Photography</i> , pp. 115-180

Friday	November 6	Cone, <i>God of the Oppressed</i> , chs. 1 and 2 (pp. 1-35)
Monday	November 9	Cone, <i>God of the Oppressed</i> , ch. 6 (pp. 99-126)
Wednesday	November 11	Cone, <i>God of the Oppressed</i> , chs. 7 and 10 (pp. 127-149, 207-225)
Friday	November 13	Listen to “Gospel and Blues” Spotify list Paper prospectus due
Monday	November 16	N.B.: Last day to withdraw Buber, <i>I and Thou</i> , First Part (pp. 53-85)
Wednesday	November 18	Buber, <i>I and Thou</i> , Second Part (pp. 87-122)
Friday	November 20	Buber, <i>I and Thou</i> , Third Part, Afterword (pp. 123-182)
Monday	November 23	Review day—read all analytical summaries since previous review day and be prepared to discuss all materials from that period
Tuesday	November 24	Benjamin, “On the Concept of History” (**) LAST DAY OF CLASS—All classes meet on Monday schedule All comparative papers due via e-mail by 5pm Central Time, Friday November 27