

Philosophy 180: Philosophy of Comedy

Fall 2016
UNC Chapel Hill
TR 3:30pm–4:45pm
Frederick Brooks Building 009

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Course Description

This is a course on various philosophical issues related to laughter and humor. The course is roughly divided into three sections, though part of the aim of the course is to explore connections between these sections: 1) Historical and contemporary philosophical theories of humor; 2) Connections between more traditional issues in philosophical aesthetics and the philosophy of humor; and 3) Moral questions about humor, including the question of what makes some jokes racist/sexist/heterosexist/etc and the question of how humor and morality interact.

Readings

You will need to purchase the following texts:

Inside Jokes by R. Adams, D. Dennett, and M. Hurley (IJ)
Humour: A Very Short Introduction by Noel Carroll (HAVSI)
Beauty: A Very Short Introduction by Roger Scruton (BAVSI)

The other readings will be made available on Sakai.

Course Requirements

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Daily Writing: 15%

Midterm: 25%

Final Paper (2500 words, approximately 10 pgs.): 25%

Final Exam: 25%

Class participation: 10%

On average, you should expect to spend approximately 4–5 hours per week doing the assigned reading and completing the Daily Writing assignments. If you aren't able to make this time commitment, you shouldn't take the course.

Daily Writing

For each class period, you are required to complete a short Daily Writing assignment, to be submitted through the Sakai Drop Box feature. The Daily Writing assignment should be approximately 250–300 words. For each assignment, select a claim, argument, example, or other noteworthy element of that day's reading assignment, briefly summarize the relevant point, and then explain your reaction to it. Daily Writing assignments will receive full credit if they are submitted by 2:30pm and make a good-faith effort to meaningfully engage with the reading. Daily Writing assignments will be accepted for half-credit up to 24 hours late. After that, the assignment will receive no credit. Please do not modify your submission in the Sakai Drop Box after the deadline, as it will be impossible to confirm that you submitted your assignment on time.

Late Policy

The Late Policy for Daily Writing assignments is explained above. All requests to take the Midterm or Final Exam at a time other than the scheduled time must go through the Office of the Dean of Students (<https://deanofstudents.unc.edu/>). Late Final Papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each calendar day (or part thereof) that they are late.

Accommodations

If you require reasonable accommodations for a documented disability, you must register with ARS (<https://accessibility.unc.edu/>). Once we receive ARS's recommendations, we will work with you to implement them as appropriate.

Outside Sources

Please do not refer to any sources other than the assigned readings in your Daily Writing assignments or Final Paper. The one exception is the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/>), which is very useful for general background reading on philosophical terms and topics.

Plagiarism

The UNC Instrument of Student Governance defines plagiarism as “deliberate or reckless representation of another’s words, thoughts, or ideas as one’s own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.” You are on your Honor not to commit plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, and we must report any suspected cases of academic dishonesty to the Honor Court.

In your Final Paper, you may use whichever standard citation convention that you’d like (Chicago Manual of Style, MLA, footnotes, endnotes, etc.), as long as you apply that convention consistently. But any words that you borrow from any external source must appear in quotation marks, and you must provide some sort of internal citation (e.g., a footnote or endnote) indicating where those words came from. It is also a form of plagiarism to closely paraphrase text from an external source without proper citation, changing a few of the words but imitating the structure of the external source. Text that appears in your papers outside of quotation marks must be your own words, and those words must be presented within your own sentential and organizational structure.

In addition, please bear in mind that plagiarism can be committed non-deliberately; if you are reckless in your use of other people’s words or ideas, then you have committed plagiarism even if you didn’t mean to do so. If you have any questions at all about proper citation of other people’s words or ideas in the course, please don’t hesitate to come talk to us about them.

Course Schedule

8/23: Course Overview

Historical and Contemporary Theories of Humor

8/25 and 8/30: Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Hobbes, Descartes, and Hutcheson. Read pp. 10–40 of *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Sakai).

9/1 and 9/6: Kant, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Freud, Spencer, and Bergson. Read pp. 45–64, 83–89, and 99–126 of *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Sakai).

9/8: Flickering. Read LaFollette and Shanks, “Belief and the Basis of Humor” (Sakai).

9/13 and 9/15: Play Theory. Read Morreall, *Comic Relief* Chapters 1–3 (Sakai).

9/20 and 9/22: Carroll on Humor. For 9/20, read HAVSI Chapter 1. For 9/22, read HAVSI Chapter 2.

9/27 and 9/29: The Science of Humor. For 9/27, read Ruch, “Psychology of humor” (Sakai). For 9/29, read Attardo, “A primer for the linguistics of humor” (Sakai).

10/4, 10/6, and 10/11: Adams, Dennett, and Hurley’s Computational Theory. For 10/4 and 10/6, read IJ Chapters 1–3 and 5–7. For 10/11, read IJ Chapters 8–10.

10/13: Catch-up and Midterm Review

10/18: In-class Midterm

10/20: NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

The Aesthetics of Humor

10/25: Taste. Read Hume, “Of The Standard of Taste” (Sakai).

10/27, 11/1, and 11/3: Background in Aesthetics. For 10/27, read Chapters 1 and 3 of BAVSI. For 11/1, read Chapters 4–6 of BAVSI. For 11/3, read Chapters 8 and 9 of BAVSI.

11/8 and 11/10: Humor as an Aesthetic Concept. For 11/8, read Hartz and Hunt, “The Beauty and the Beast” Section IV (Sakai) and Morreall, *Comic Relief* Chapter 4 (Sakai). For 11/10, read Carroll, “Horror and Humor” (Sakai).

11/15: Humor in the Arts. Read Klein, *Art and Laughter* Chapters 3, 5, and 6 (Sakai).

The Ethics of Humor

11/17, 11/22, and 11/29: The Applied Ethics of Humor. For 11/17, read Bergmann, “How Many Feminists Does It Take to Make a Joke?” (Sakai) and Philips, “Racist Acts and Racist Humor” (Sakai). For 11/22, read Smuts, “The Ethics of Humor: Can Your Sense of Humor be Wrong?” (Sakai) and Anderson, “Racist Humor” (Sakai). For 11/29, read Morreall, *Comic Relief* Chapter 6 (Sakai) and Swift, “A Modest Proposal” (Sakai).

12/1: Humor and Feminism. Read Mizejewski, Introduction to *Pretty/Funny* (Sakai).

12/6: Aesthetic-Ethical Interaction. Read Stecker, "The Interaction of Ethical and Aesthetic Value" (Sakai).

Final Paper due on Friday 12/9 at 5pm.

12/15 at **4pm**: Final Exam. The Final Exam will be a **two-hour** exam, and will end at **6pm**.