Course Description and Goals:

Socrates, often regarded as the founder of Western philosophy, famously asserted that an "unexamined life is not worth living for a human being." A major recent force in determining both the form and content of human life, and thus demanding the critical, philosophical reflection that Socrates termed "examination", is popular (or mass) culture. The aim of this course will be to enable students to engage in the critical reflection central to the discipline of philosophy (the love of wisdom)--that which would facilitate living an examined, and hence worthy and properly human, life--about, in, and through popular culture. What is popular or mass culture? Is it something merely "manufactured" by special interests, or is it still in any way genuine culture, the product of free and spontaneous human interaction? Are the products of popular culture (movies, music, games, sports, etc.) merely sources of entertainment or distraction, or might they serve other purposes such as providing for a sense of community and identity? Do they serve merely to bypass (or even undermine) critical reflection, to inculcate particular perspectives or values into those who are exposed to or who participate in them without their conscious awareness? Might they rather, upon scrutiny, provide the basis for the kind of critical reflection commonly regarded as facilitated only by "high" culture?

By way of testing the last of these hypotheses, of the capacity for popular culture to facilitate genuinely critical reflection--the examination of life--a range of products of popular culture will be examined alongside texts that seek to illuminate and reveal the ideas at work in those products, and in relation to some works of classical philosophy, ancient and modern. As a result, students should expect to develop an enhanced capacity for intelligent reflection upon popular culture, and through it, upon a range of central issues that have been the subject of traditional philosophical examination (see headings in schedule below), and ultimately to live more fully examined lives.

Required Texts:

- *Ghost World* by Daniel Clowes (1997)
- Other Readings available on Blackboard page for the course (Course Documents/Readings).
Assignments and Grades:

- Three Essays - 60% (20% each). ~3 pages. These essays will require students to engage popular culture as a topic, and as a tool, for philosophical reflection, to critically examine both the nature and function of popular culture and to critically examining lived experience through popular culture. Several prompts will be provided, allowing a range of choice amongst materials and problems examined within the course. Outlines—a detailed plan constructed prior to the composition of one's essay—will be a required portion of the assignment. Essays will require both careful explication of, and critical response to, course materials and will be graded upon both the subtlety and accuracy of understanding, and the depth and originality of reflection displayed. They will be assigned nine days prior to their due date, providing ample time to seek assistance in class, discussion sections, and in office hours. A guide to writing a quality philosophy paper will be available for download on Blackboard.

- Final Project - 20%. ~3 pages. This project will involve working with materials chosen from popular culture by the individual student, engaging and employing those chosen materials in philosophical inquiry which they facilitate. These materials may be chosen from popular music, television, film, web-based materials, video games, etc., or some combination thereof. Students will then be responsible for considering their function as culture in light of the variety of treatments that question has received through the course, and to engage the material at the level of its meaning, and the resources it provides through that meaning, in the pursuit of a reflective (examined) life.

- Class Attendance and Participation - 10% (Participation requires that students have completed all assigned readings or other out of class work prior to the class session for which they are assigned.)

- In-class or Take-home Assignments - 10%. These will consist of short writing assignments, assigned only in class and due the following class period. If the event of an absence it will be the student's responsibility to find out what the assignment is. I recommend making arrangement with another student with whom one can consult on such matters as these assignments will neither be distributed via email, nor posted to Blackboard. These assignments must be printed and submitted on relevant day to receive credit.

Assignments Guidelines:

All written work, unless otherwise specified, should be written independently. You are encouraged to discuss all aspects of this course with your fellow students, but the work you turn in must be entirely your own. Any academic dishonesty will result, at minimum, in course failure. All work is to be submitted in class, unless otherwise directed. No work may be submitted via email without prior arrangement.

University of Oregon Academic Misconduct Code:
http://uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/tabid/248/Default.aspx

Philosophy Department Grading Rubric:

A = excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.
B = good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.
C = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.
D = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.
F = failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a complete lack of effort.

**Technology Guidelines:**

*No* electronic devices may be used during class time. This includes all portable computers, tablets, phones, blackberries, mp3 players, etc. When emailing your esteemed instructor(s), please reference PHL 130 in the topic heading, address the email (Steven, Dr. Brenece, etc.), use complete sentences, proper punctuation and spelling, and sign your message. Please *do* email me if I can be of assistance, but do not contribute to the further deterioration of our capacity for language, or to basic standards of politeness and civility, in the process.

**Classroom Guidelines:**

Class attendance is required. You are expected to arrive before class begins, be respectful and polite to everyone in the room, and to stay until it ends. If you should need to leave before the end of class, please let your instructor know before class begins.

**Accessibility:**

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if aspects of the instruction or course design result in barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Office of Accessible Education in 164 Oregon Hall at 346-1155 or uoaecc@uoregon.edu
PHIL 130, Brench

Course Schedule:

Week One - What is Mass Culture? What does it do?

Monday, 9/30 - Introduction
Wednesday, 10/2 - Read "The Culture Industry Reconsidered" by Theodor Adorno
  Watch Detour (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945) [http://archive.org/details/Detour_movie]
Friday, 10/4 - Read "Film Noir and the Frankfurt School: America as Wasteland in Edgar
  Ulmer's Detour"

Week Two - Brazil (Terry Gilliam, 1985) - A Case Study

  Sunday, 10/6 - Screening of Brazil (Terry Gilliam, 1985), 7 p.m., Lillis 182
Monday, 10/7 - Discussion of Brazil - Director's Cut
Wednesday, 10/9 - Discussion of Brazil - Love Conquers All version [Essay #1 assigned]
Friday, 10/11 - Discussion of The Battle of Brazil

Week Three - Friendship

  Sunday, 10/13 - Screening of Stand By Me (Rob Reiner, 1986), 7 p.m., location tba
Monday, 10/14 - Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book VIII by Aristotle
Wednesday, 10/16 - Discussion of Stand By Me (Rob Reiner, 1986)
Friday, 10/18 - Discussion of Stand By Me continued
  [Essay #1 due]

Week Four - Friendship

Monday, 10/21 - Read "Why Can't We Be Virtual Friends?" by Craig Condella and "Care Ethics,
  Friendship, and Facebook" by Maurice Hamington
Wednesday, 10/23 - Read "With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies?" by Elizabeth Losh
  and "The Friendship that Makes No Demands" by Matthew Tedesco
Friday, 10/25 - Discussion of Friends episode

Week Five - Privacy, Security, and Patriotism

Sunday, 10/27 - Screening of The Lives of Others (F. H. von Donnersmarck, 2005) 7
  p.m., location tba
Monday, 10/28 - Read "Nothing to Hide: The False Choice Between Security and Privacy" by
  Daniel Solove and "Visible Man: Ethics in a World Without Secrets" by Peter
  Singer [Essay #2 assigned]
Wednesday, 10/30 - Discussion of The Lives of Others
Friday, 11/1 - Discussion of The Lives of Others continued
Week Six - Privacy, Security, and Patriotism

Sunday, 11/3 - Screening of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (Frank Capra, 1939), 7 p.m., location tba
Monday, 11/4 - Read "Crito" by Plato and "Taking One for the Team: Baseball and Sacrifice" by Willie Young (packet)
Wednesday, 11/6 - Discussion of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington [Essay #2 due]
Friday, 11/8 - Discussion of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington

Week Seven - Meaning, Authenticity, and Nihilism

Monday, 11/11 - Read from "Beyond Good and Evil" and "Thus Spake Zarathustra" by Friedrich Nietzsche
Wednesday, 11/13 - Read "Radiohead: Nietzsche, Nihilism and 'Hail to the Thief'" by Devon Lougheed
Friday, 11/15 - Read "The Simpsons, Hyper-Irony, and the Meaning of Life" by Carl Matheson

Week Eight - Meaning, Authenticity, and Nihilism

Sunday, 11/17 - Screening of Ghost World (Terry Zwigoff, 2001), 7 p.m., location tba
Monday, 11/18 - Discussion of Ghost World (Terry Zwigoff, 2001) [Essay #3 assigned]
Wednesday, 11/20 - Read Ghost World (graphic novel) by Daniel Clowes
    Read "Jean-Paul Sartre Meets Enid Coleslaw: Existential Themes in Ghost World" by Laura Canis and Paul Canis
Friday, 11/22 - Read "Memorial Address" by Martin Heidegger

Week Nine - Love, Beauty, and Happiness

Monday, 11/25 - Read "Letter to Menoeceus" by Epicurus and "On the Sufferings of the World" by Arthur Schopenhauer (packet)
Wednesday, 11/27 - Read "Epicurean Satisfaction" (Rolling Stones) by Ruth Tallman and "You Can't Always Get What You Want" by Luke Dick (packet), Discussion of DEVO's "Satisfaction" [Essay #3 due]
Friday, 11/29 - Thanksgiving

Week Ten - Love, Beauty, and Happiness

Monday, 12/1 - Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book I by Aristotle (packet) and "Seinfeld: George's Failed Quest for Happiness: An Aristotelean Analysis" by Daniel Barwick (packet)
Wednesday, 11/3 - Read "Free Time" by Theodor Adorno, Discussion of Office Space (Mike Judge, 1999)
Friday, 11/5 - Discussion of WALL*E (Andrew Stanton, 2008)
Finals Week

Tuesday, 12/10 Final Exam: Final Projects Due: 10:15 am

*The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this schedule. Any such changes will be announced in class, via email, and on Blackboard. It will the responsibility of students to keep track of such changes after they are announced. The schedule on Blackboard will be kept scrupulously up to date and may be relied upon. Be sure to check it if you are at all unsure as to dates of readings or other assignments