In this course, we will explore an important and pervasive theme in the aesthetic theorizing of the post-Kantian period, especially pronounced in German Romanticism, and going through the 20th century to certain key segments of artistic, literary, and musical modernism. An oft-expressed ambition is that art will somehow step in and fill the void left behind by waning religion. Or if not put quite so explicitly, art gets ambitiously tasked with some of the exalted roles that religion plays or has played: offering insight into ultimate metaphysics, presenting mythic archetypes, preserving a sense of the sacred, orienting us in a moral landscape, granting “salvation” or “redemption” (whatever these might mean outside a doctrinal framework), and offering hope, consolation, and the like. We will look at several variations on this broad theme in philosophy, the arts, and art criticism.

In what follows, I give several (3-4) main readings each week and a set of further readings, for those wanting to go into more depth or to have additional background. I give an addendum of some further reading on issues about the nature of religion and about secularization at the end of the syllabus.

8 Sep. Introduction

Jennifer Herdt, “Ethical Formation and the Invention of the Religion of Art,” (Ch. 4) in her Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition (University of Chicago Press, 2019).


Further Reading:

Bernd Auerochs, Die Entstehung der Kunstreligion (Vandehoeck & Rupprecht, 2009).


Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History*, (Chicago, 2001), Part IV.


**15 Sep. Early German Romanticism**


Further Reading:


**22 Sep. Aesthetic Reconciliation and Theodicy [visit by Mark Alznauer ( Northwestern)]**


Further Reading:


29 Sep. Wagner—Music Drama and the Consecration of the Stage
Richard Wagner, “Religion and Art” in Richard Wagner’s Prose Works, Vol. VI, trans. W. Ashton Ellis (University of Nebraska Press, 1994) [read the first several paragraphs and skim or skip the rest.]


Further Reading:

Patrick Carnegy, Wagner and the Art of the Theatre, esp. Chs. 3 and 4 (Yale University Press, 2006).

Constantin Floros, Music as Message: An Introduction to Musical Semantics, trans. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch (Peter Lang, 2016), Ch. V


Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival*, (Yale University Press, 2004), Ch. 2


**6 Oct: George Eliot—Hope and the Religion of Humanity**


Further Reading:


13 October: Literature, Culture, and Ethics


Further Reading:


John Gibson, *Fiction and the Weave of Life* (Oxford University Press, 2007)


**** 20 Oct—Princeton Fall Break ****

**27 Oct: Aestheticism, Contemplation, and Beauty**


Oscar Wilde, “The Decay of Lying” in *Intentions* (Methuen, 1911).

[Please focus especially on the final remarks of Vivian in the dialogue.]

Further Reading:


3 Nov. Rothko—The ‘Threshold of the Divine’ and Abstract Painting
Mark Rothko, “Notes from a Conversation with Selden Rodman, 1956” in Mark Rothko: Writings on Art, ed. Miguel Lopez-Remiro (Yale University Press, 2006).


Further Reading on Rothko:


Annie Cohen-Solal, Mark Rothko: Toward the Light in the Chapel (Yale University Press, 2015).


Further Readings on Formalism and Abstraction
Clive Bell, Art (Stokes, 1914).


Roger Fry, Vision and Design (Dover, 1998).

Michalle Gal, Deep Formalism and the Emergence of Modernist Aesthetics, (Peter Lang, 2015).


Michael Newall, What is a Picture? Depiction, Realism, Abstraction (Palgrave Macmillan 2011).

Kendall Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe (Harvard University Press, 1990), esp. 54-57

10 November: Epiphanies and the Modernist Novel


**Further Reading:**


Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (Columbia University Press, 2010), Ch. 5


17 November:
NO CLASS

1 Dec: **Heidegger - Poetry and the ‘Trace of the Fugitive Gods’**

Martin Heidegger, “Why Poets?” in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge, 2002). [This is a very challenging essay, particularly if you are not already very familiar with Hölderlin and Rilke. The first five pages are the most important for us.]


[It would also be useful to read Hölderlin’s poems “Bread and Wine,” “The Rhine” and “Germania.” Michael Hamburger’s translations are excellent.]

**Further Reading:**


8 Dec: **Myth and Reconciliation in the Movies**


Irving Singer, *Cinematic Mythmaking: Philosophy in Film* (MIT Press, 2008), Introduction and Ch. 1

[You may also want to see the film *The Lady Eve*, dir. Preston Sturges (1941), which is discussed in two of the readings.]

**Further Reading:**


Robert Pippin, *Filmed Thought: Cinema as Reflective Form* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), Ch. 1


Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (University of Texas Press, 1995).


**15 Dec. Conclusion**
Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (Routledge, 1970), Ch. 3, esp. p. 82-86.


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**Addendum: Further reading on the nature of religion and religious experience as well as the idea of secularization**

(Obviously, this is an enormous topic. Some suggestions are as follows:]


