

The UC Berkeley Program in Medieval Studies invites submissions for an interdisciplinary graduate student conference:

“Medieval Ethics and Aesthetics: The Good and the Beautiful?”

February 20-21, 2015

University of California, Berkeley

Keynote: Alex Novikoff, Forham University

In *The Sense of the Song of Roland* (1987), Robert F. Cook suggests that this well-known *chanson de geste* "should be read as certain other works of art of its time are 'read,' **as an ethical statement, embodying values in a framework that is no less aesthetically satisfying for all that it conveys ideas.** Recognizing its power means admitting that our ancestors may have been moved, even excited, by ideals whose aesthetic status is greatly diminished today." (130)

The Middle Ages has suffered from a double-edged stereotype: on the one hand, it has been considered a time when didacticism and dogma flourished at the expense of art and aesthetics; on the other hand, it has been viewed as a period without any significant advances in the philosophy of ethics. These one-dimensional notions of medieval aesthetics and ethics have collapsed in recent years under the weight of new work dealing with the nexus between these two branches of philosophy and their material manifestations in medieval texts and objects. Innovative critics have teased out the sometimes surprising ways in which medieval art in all media could perform ethical work; the imbrication of ethics and form in the medieval discipline of rhetoric is already well-known, but is enjoying new attention. This conference invites a conversation about the varied ways in which a concern with ethics – however that may have been construed at different times and places throughout the period– entered into a fruitful relationship with artistic production. It looks, in short, to discover the manifold ways in which medieval artists, thinkers, and writers reconciled “The Good” and “The Beautiful.”

We wish to throw this conversation open to emerging scholars across the disciplines, including those whose work falls outside of standard conceptions of “the medieval”-- that is, outside the Latin West.

Questions addressed might include, but will not be limited to:

- The context and formal strategies of didactic art, such as allegorical pieces;
- Medieval debates about the ethical status of art, particularly secular aesthetic production;
- Contradictions (or congruities) between medieval theory and medieval praxis;
- The development of new models of aesthetic production in the vernacular;
- Prescriptive codes of conduct in secular or religious contexts (for example, chivalry/courtliness, debates about clothing and fashion, or grammatical treatises), and subversion or flaws in performance of these;
- The evocation of these categories in constructing modern medievalisms.

Submit abstracts of no more than 500 words to medieval.ethics.aesthetics@gmail.com by **November 20, 2014.**