

Phil 343: Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to philosophical questions and issues about art and aesthetics. Philosophical questions about art are not restricted to one branch of philosophy, but encompass metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, social and political philosophy, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language. Questions that we will pursue include: (a) what is art, (b) what makes a work a member of a specific artkind, e.g. music or poetry, (c) what is the ontological status of various artkinds, such as music or poetry, (d) how should we understand aesthetic properties, (e) can pornography ever be art, (f) how can we make sense of aesthetic disagreement, (g) what should we say about works of immoral art or by immoral artists, (h) how should we understand and appreciate aesthetics in non-art contexts, and (i) when is a work of art complete. While by no means exhaustive, students will be exposed to a wide variety of central concerns in the field and will come out of the course with a firm understanding of, and appreciation for, the philosophical issues that art and aesthetics give rise to.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

In this course, we will explore some of the foundational issues in philosophy of art and philosophical aesthetics. By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Characterize many of the central issues in philosophy of art and aesthetics.
- Discuss and evaluate the main theses and arguments about those issues in a reasoned and neutral way.
- Articulate and defend your own views on those issues.
- Make connections between philosophy of art and aesthetics and other areas of philosophy.
- Write a research paper in a philosophically rigorous, analytic, and concise manner.
- Be able to analyze and evaluate art from diverse philosophical perspectives.
- Apply the theories and concepts of the course to your own artmaking, theorizing or criticism.

Course Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course. Course readings will be from a variety of sources, including articles, discussion notes, and book chapters. All reading materials will be made available on the course website or on reserve from the library.

Grading

Letter grades (corresponding to a 4-point scale: A=4, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, etc.) will be assigned based on the following:

SNTs

20%

Presentation	20%
Mid-term Paper	20%
Final Paper	25%
Participation	15%

Assignments

Socratic Note Taking (SNT)

The purpose of these assignments is to help you read articles more effectively, and to provide accountability for completing the readings. “Socratic Note Taking” is named after Socrates, who famously taught by asking questions. In these notes, you will write questions as you read. Think of it as a reading quiz that you create yourself, along with an answer key. A set of notes is due for each reading. Students will be required to produce three questions and answers per reading, roughly equidistant throughout each reading. Collectively, these are worth 20% of your grade. Complete and submit your questions/answers on the course website prior to the start of the class for which they’re due.

Presentation

Each student will give a presentation, worth 20% of their final grade, which will happen throughout the second part of the semester. The presentations will involve you making your own piece of art with some philosophical theme or relating your art back to the theories or concepts we learned in the course. You can use any medium or genre and will present your artwork to the class, accompanied by an explanation of it and its philosophical relevance or theme which you will also submit in written form (about 1-2 pages).

Mid-term Paper

The first paper, due around mid-semester, will be 1500-2000 words (~5-6 pages) and is worth 20% of the final grade. Students will pick a piece of art as a case study (which work is totally up to you) and give some historical, biographical, or empirical background about the work and then analyze the work using the theories and concepts we learned in the first half of the semester, with particular focus on how different theories/definitions of art apply to the chosen piece.

Final Paper

The final paper should be 2500-3000 words (~8-10 pages), is worth 25%, and will be your own contribution to one of the debates we look at during the course. Students will develop an argument for some position that we discussed and consider and respond to potential objections. Students will turn in an outline, which I will return with comments, and then submit the final paper at the end of the semester, during finals.

Participation

There is a participation grade worth 15% of your final grade, awarded on the basis of participating in class discussions. Coming to office hours to discuss the course material can count towards the participation grade.

Class Expectations

- **Course Readings:** Students should do all the assigned readings before the class in which they’re discussed as this is necessary to complete the SNTs, but also because class discussion

will be much more fruitful if we're all on the same page. All readings are available on the course webpage.

- **Attendance:** As this is an upper division course, I expect you to attend (though I understand that things come up). I will keep track of attendance and you should notify me of any absences.
- **Electronics Policy:** Laptops, tablets, and phones are not permitted during class unless needed for in-class work. Using electronics is distracting to both yourself and others, and studies have shown that it lowers grades of the user and those around them. If you require a special accommodation regarding electronics please come see me to request an exemption.
- **Communication:** You can contact me via e-mail. I will endeavour to respond within 24 hours, but usually don't respond after 5pm on weekdays nor on weekends. My principal method of communicating with you will be via e-mail, so be sure to check this daily.
- **Late Work Policy:** Late assignments without an extension will be downgraded by 1/3 of a letter grade per day after the due date (e.g. A to A-), up to a penalty of 2 full letter grades (after which they won't be accepted). Consult with me to request an extension. Extensions will not be granted for the SNTs; late SNTs will be graded as 0.
- **Grade Disagreement:** I am happy to discuss your graded assignments with you. I ask that you first read through my comments on your assignment, write down any questions you have, and then schedule an appointment with me. Note that I require a 24-hour "cooling off" period before discussing grades. If you think a grade you have received is unfair, please write a paragraph explaining why and send it to me via email. Note that this can result in your initial grade being *either raised or lowered*.
- **Extra Credit:** As a matter of general policy, no extra credit will be offered in this course unless *extremely* unusual circumstances arise which necessitate it.
- **Classroom Etiquette:** Students are expected to respect each other, allow others the chance to speak, and be open-minded to views different from their own. We're here to learn and that's best done through community building, a prerequisite of which is respect and toleration.
- **Syllabus:** Readings and schedule are subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and on the course webpage.

Provisional Course Schedule

Unit 1: What Is Art?

Week 1: Intentions, Representation, and Historical Definitions

The Republic, Plato (selections)

Definitions of Art, Davies (1991; selections)

"Defining Art Historically", Levinson (1979)

Week 2: Functional and Institutional Definitions

The Aesthetic Point of View, Beardsley (1982; selections)

“The Aesthetic Engagement Theory of Art”, Grafton-Cardwell (forthcoming)

The Art Circle, Dickie (1984; selections)

Week 3: Cluster Theories

“The Role of Theory in Aesthetics”, Weitz (1956)

“The Cluster Account of Art”, Gaut (2000)

“Art: What It Is and Why It Matters”, Abell (2012)

Unit 2: Art and Artkinds

Week 4: Multiple and Singular Artworks

Art and Its Objects, Wollheim (1968; selections)

“What a Musical Work Is”, Levinson (1980)

Works of Music, Dodd (2007; selections)

Fiction and Metaphysics, Thomasson (1999; selections)

Week 5: Hard Cases

The Transfiguration of the Commonplace, Danto (1981; selections)

“What 4’33” Is”, Dodd (2018)

“Ready-Mades: Ontology and Aesthetics”, Eynine (2013)

Week 6: Authorship and Creation

“The Artist’s Sanction in Contemporary Art”, Irvin (2005)

“Artistic Freedom and Moral Rights in Contemporary Art: The Mass MoCa Controversy”, Gover (2011)

Week 7: Artistic Completion

“The Complete Work”, Trogdon and Livingston (2014)

“Ambivalent Agency: A Response to Trogdon and Livingston on Artwork Completion”, Gover (2015)

“Psychologism and Completeness in the Arts”, Rohrbaugh (2017)

Mid-term Papers Due

Unit 4: Aesthetics

Week 8: Aesthetic Empiricism

“What Makes ‘Aesthetic’ Terms Aesthetic?”, Kivy (1975)

“The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art”, Shelley (2003)

Week 9: Aesthetic Disagreement

“Of the Standard of Taste”, Hume (1757)

“Disagreements About Taste”, Sundell (2011)

“Autonomy and Aesthetic Engagement”, Nguyen (forthcoming)

Week 10: Everyday Aesthetics

Everyday Aesthetics, Saito (2010; selections)

“The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience”, Irvin (2008)
Functional Beauty, Parsons and Carlson (2008; selections)

Unit 5: Ethical Considerations

Week 11: Art and Pornography

“Why Pornography Can’t Be Art”, Mag Uidhir (2009)

“Who Says Pornography Can’t be Art?”, Maes (2012)

“What’s Wrong with the (Female) Nude? A Feminist Perspective on Art and Pornography”, Eaton (2012)

Week 12: Cultural Appropriation

“Profound Offense and Cultural Appropriation”, Young (2005)

“Cultural Appropriation and the Intimacy of Groups”, Nguyen and Strohl (2019)

Week 13: Immoral Art and Artists

“On Obscenity: The Thrill and Repulsion of the Morally Prohibited”, Kieran (2002)

“Monuments as Commitments: How Art Speaks to Groups and How Groups Think in Art”,
Nguyen (2019)

Final Paper Outlines Due

Final Papers Due During Exam Period