

PHIL 31060: PHILOSOPHY OF ART & BEAUTY (SPRING 2024)

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OFFICE LOCATION: Bowman Hall, 320, Room N

PRIMARY OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays, 1-4pm, Fridays, 11-1pm

REQUIRED COURSE TEXT: Lamarque & Olsen (eds.), *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophy is often thought of as providing answers to questions of value, and thinkers from across a wide range of cultural traditions have identified three core types of value: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Epistemology deals with the evaluations of our attempts to access the truth, investigating concepts such as the evidence for a theory, the justification of a belief, and the rationality of an inference. Ethics concerns the moral notions of goodness, including the virtues of character, the rightness of actions, and the justice of social institutions. Aesthetics is the study of the third evaluative domain—beauty. In this course, we address a number of live questions in this domain.

Traditionally, aesthetics has focused mainly on art and artistic creations. But beauty can be found outside of the art gallery, the concert hall, and the theater stage. We begin this course by identifying “ordinary” cases of beauty from everyday life. We then broaden our discussion to include the beauty that can be found in the natural world—in animals, plants, ecosystems, and even nonliving structures. Can the appreciation of such beauty give rise to distinctively *moral* obligations towards animals and the environment?

It is often said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Assessing this claim requires us to first get a handle on the nature of aesthetic experience. What goes on when we judge something to be beautiful, interesting, funny, delightful, wondrous, awesome, amazing, excellent, majestic, and the like? How do such evaluative concepts enter into our perception of things in the world? What role do the emotions and the imagination play in our ability to make such judgments? And what’s involved in training ourselves to appreciate aesthetic qualities? Perhaps understanding the nature of aesthetic *expertise* can illuminate both the objectivity and the subjectivity of aesthetic judgments.

Connecting aesthetics to ethics and epistemology, we ask two fundamental questions: First, what is the relation between the moral content of a work of art and its aesthetic value? For instance, can a work of art be excellent despite depicting or endorsing something immoral? Second, does art provide access to truths in a distinctive way, or does it more often serve to distort the truth than to reveal it?

We end the course by looking at a variety of attempts to define the notoriously difficult notion of *art*, both with regard to “high art” and with regard to “pop art”, looking at a wide range of genres, modalities, and media.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Readings

Required readings for every class session are listed in the course schedule. Studying philosophical texts sometimes requires more than one reading. A good idea is to do each reading one time before the lecture, and then a second time when doing the assignment associated with that reading. If you ever feel like you're not understanding the main points of the texts, I encourage you to contact me with any questions that you have. We can meet in person or over Teams, during office hours or at other times.

Several Micro Assignments (30% of the final grade)

The main purpose of these assignments is to make sure that you've done the required readings and understood the *main points* that the authors make, the *main arguments* they put forward, and the *key concepts* that they use. The assignments will consist of specific questions that you can only answer, or prompts that you can only address, if you've done the readings. The word-count requirements will be anywhere from 300 words to 1000 words, and the point-value of each assignment will vary accordingly.

Experiential Learning Requirement (20% of the grade)

You are required to attend two of the following types of event throughout the semester. Each of these counts for 10% of the final grade.

- Concert or musical event
- Museum trip
- Theater performance
- Poetry reading
- Local community arts events
- Photography exhibit
- Live comedy show
- Fashion exhibit or runway show
- Musical recording session
- Nature experience

Throughout the semester, I will be providing opportunities throughout the semester to accompany me to the Cleveland Museum of Art, the MOCA, to some plays at Playhouse Square, some comedy shows in Downtown Cleveland, as well as concerts at the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and the House of Blues (or similar). I'll also do my best to arrange a live recording session for you to attend.

- You get 3% for just going to the event and staying there for all or most of it.
 - You get another 3% for writing 500-1000 words that summarize/describe the event.
 - The last 4% is for a 500-1000 word discussion of how the event pertains to the course readings, lectures, and discussions.
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Two PowerPoint or Keynote Presentations (30% of the grade)

In each week of the course, one of the days (usually Thursday) will include a student presentation. Every student will be required to give two presentations throughout the semester, with several opportunities for two people to co-present. Each presentation will count for 15% of the final grade, for a total of 30%. The presentations will be based on the readings that are assigned for that week. They have to meet these requirements:

- Please provide a picture/photo of the **authors**
- Include pictures of any of the **artworks** mentioned in the target essay
- State and define any novel **key concepts** from the target essays
- State the **main arguments** and **central claims** of the target essays
- Quote 2-3 **key passages** from the target essays
- Identify the **relations between** the target essays
- Give **your own opinion** of the essays, providing support for it
- Quote 1-2 passages that you **did not understand** or want to clarify
- Provide 2-3 **discussion questions** for the class to follow up on
- Please be prepared to answer questions about the essays after the presentation

The length of the presentation will depend on several factors, including (i) the difficulty of the required readings, (ii) whether you're presenting in the beginning, middle, or end of the semester, (iii) whether you're presenting alone or in a pair, (iv) your prior interest in philosophy, art, and the specific topic of the week, (v) your prior experience and comfort with public speaking, and (vi) miscellaneous other considerations that you can feel free to discuss with me ahead of time.

Class Participation (20% of the final grade)

This is different from mere attendance. To get the full 20% of class participation credit, you need to get 20 class participation points. Here's how you get these points:

- Anyone who makes contributions to class discussion gets 1 point for that day
- If you're presenting, you automatically get 1 point for that day
- For each class session, there will be 2 "public note-takers" and 2 "internet searchers", each of whom automatically receives a class participation point for that day.
 - These roles will revolve every class session, and will involve using a computer throughout the session.
- Impossible-to-predict opportunities: Throughout the semester, there will be random opportunities to engage with the course in a way that isn't covered above.
 - Usually, I'll announce an opportunity in class and then clarify it by email and/or on Canvas. Any points you earn this way will figure into your class participation grade.

Summary of the grading system

Here is how your final grade will be calculated:

- 30% of the final grade for all the micro assignments put together
- 30% of the final grade for the two in-class presentations
- 20% of the final grade for the two experiential learning assignments
- 20% of the final grade for all the forms class participation described above

The following provides a translation from the numerical score to a letter grade:

A 96-100	B+ 86-90	C+ 71-75	D 56-60
A- 91-95	B 81-85	C 66-70	F 55 or below
	B- 76-80	C- 61-65	

There is no “curve” for the course. It is conceivable—though exceedingly unlikely—that everyone in the course will receive an A. (Or an F.) This means that *you are not in competition with your classmates for high grades*. You are encouraged to organize study groups and help each other out.

When you receive your final grade for the course, please note that it is *non-negotiable*. I will not change grades, unless I have made a demonstrable clerical error in my calculations.

Attendance

Aside from two excused “freebie” absences, attendance is *mandatory* throughout the semester. After the two freebies, any unexcused absence or major lateness will negatively impact your final grade in the course. More than 6 unexcused absences will automatically result in a failing grade for the course.

A sign-in sheet will be passed around during each class session. All students are expected to come to class on time and to be engaged for the length of the class session. If you miss multiple class sessions, please discuss your situation with me, either in person or by email. Students who are absent from class for religious reasons or due to documented medical treatment will not incur any penalty on their final grade, but are responsible for all required reading and writing assignments.

Religious Accommodations

The University welcomes individuals from all different faiths, philosophies, religious traditions, and other systems of belief, and supports their respective practices. In compliance with University policy and the Ohio Revised Code, the University permits students to request class absences for up to three days, per term, in order to participate in organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination,

church, or other religious or spiritual organization. Students will not be penalized as a result of any of these excused absences.

The request for excusal must be made, in writing, no later than 14 days after the first day of instruction in a particular course and include the date(s) of each proposed absence or request for alternative religious accommodation. The request must clearly state that the proposed absence is to participate in religious activities. The request must also provide the particular accommodation(s) you desire.

You will be notified by me if your request for accommodation is approved, or, if it is approved with modification. I will work with you in an effort to arrange a mutually agreeable alternative arrangement. For more information regarding this Policy you may contact the Student Ombuds (ombuds@kent.edu).

Office Hours and Availability

My primary office hours are on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. However, many other options are available. If you want to meet with me at some other time, or virtually (on Teams), let me know and we can try to arrange it.

Needless to say, I can be reached by email at any time. I will do my best to respond to your emails as quickly as possible. Sometimes I will reply to your message immediately, even at odd hours, like 4am. However, please do not assume that this is always possible. Occasionally, I will not have access to email or will not be able to respond for up to several days. In such cases, please be patient.

Plagiarism, Cheating, and other forms of Academic Dishonesty

Please note that I do not tolerate academic dishonesty in any form. I take a strict stance on this. Be aware that I will dole out *maximum* penalties for violations, including assigning failing grades and pushing for suspension and/or expulsion from Kent State. If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, please make it your business to learn about this immediately. Ignorance of university policy will not be accepted as an excuse. University policy 3-01.8 deals specifically with the problem of academic dishonesty. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have questions, please visit <https://www.kent.edu/plagiarism>

Please note that I consider the use of Chat GPT (or anything like it) to be a form of academic dishonesty. Although times may change, at present it is unacceptable in the academic setting. As above, I take a strict stance on this.

Diversity Statement and Statement on Race and Racism

Kent State University is committed to the creation and maintenance of equitable and inclusive learning spaces. This course is a learning environment where all will be treated with respect and dignity, and where all individuals will have an equitable opportunity to succeed. The diversity that each student brings to this course is viewed as a strength and a benefit. Dimensions of diversity and their intersections include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, national origin, primary language, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, mental and physical abilities, socio-economic status, family/caregiver status, and veteran status.

The Kent State University community will continue to work towards opposing all forms of racial discrimination, harassment, intimidation, hatred, belittling, stereotypes, condescension, microaggressions and recognize their legacies which ostracize groups based on race and skin color. We understand that these forms of domination have historically existed within structural and systemic oppressions supported by classism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and other markers.

Information for Students with Documented Disabilities

Kent State University is committed to inclusive and accessible education experiences for all students. University Policy requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access to course content. Students with disabilities are encouraged to connect with Student Accessibility Services as early as possible to establish accommodations. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on a disability (including mental health, chronic medical conditions, or injuries), please let me know immediately. Here is the Student Accessibility Services (SAS) Contact Information:

Location: University Library, Suite 100

Email: sas@kent.edu

Phone: 330-672-3391

Web: www.kent.edu/sas

Registration and Withdrawal

University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) and correct any registration errors prior to the deadline.

Reading Schedule

All readings come from: Lamarque and Olsen (eds.), *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*

Week 0: Introduction

Tues., Jan. 16

Introduction, no readings

Thurs., Jan. 18

Introduction, no readings

Week I: Everyday Aesthetics: Beauty Outside of the Museum

Tues., Jan. 23

Yuriko Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics" (695-699)

Thurs., Jan. 25

Sherri Irvin, "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience" (700-709)

Week II: Aesthetics of Nature: Beauty Beyond Human Artifacts

Tues., Jan. 30

Allen Carlson, "Appreciation and the Natural Environment" (665-672)

Patricia Matthews, "Scientific Knowledge and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature" (673-683)

Thurs, Feb. 1

Emily Brady, "Aesthetic Character and Aesthetic Integrity in Environmental Conservation" (684-694)

Week III: Aesthetic Concepts and Aesthetic Experience

Tues., Feb. 6

Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts" (121-133)

Thurs, Feb. 8

Noël Carroll, "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience" (170-182)

Week IV: Aesthetic Perception and Evaluation

Tues., Feb. 13

Kendall L. Walton, "Categories of Art" (134-148)

Thurs, Feb. 15

Nick Zangwill, "In Defense of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism" (149-158)

Week V: Do Authors' Intentions Determine a "Correct" Interpretation?

Tues., Feb. 20

Monroe C. Beardsley, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy Revived" (187-196)

Thurs, Feb. 22

Stephen Davies, "Authors' Intentions, Literary Interpretation, and Literary Value" (208-222)

Week VI: Art and Morality: Relating the Beautiful and the Good

Tues., Feb. 27

A.W. Eaton, "What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?
A Feminist Perspective on Art and Pornography" (266-282)

Thurs, Feb. 29

Berys Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art" (247-257)

Eileen John, "Artistic Value and Opportunistic Moralism" (258-265)

Week VII: Art and Knowledge: Relating the Beautiful and the True

Tues., Mar. 5

Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Cognitive Triviality of Art" (289-294)

Thurs., Mar. 7

Cynthia A. Freeland, "Art and Moral Knowledge" (295-309)

Week VIII: Fictionality and Imagination

Tues., Mar. 12

Kendall L. Walton, "Fearing Fictions" (343-354)

Thurs., Mar. 14

EITHER: Richard Moran, "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination" (363-377)

OR: Tamar Szabo Gendler, "The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance" (378-392)

Week IX: Pictorial Art

Tues., Mar. 19

Richard Wollheim, "On Pictorial Representation" (421-430)

OPTIONAL: Catharine Abell, "Pictorial Realism" (431-440)

Thurs., Mar. 21

David Davies, "Telling Pictures: The Place of Narrative in Late Modern 'Visual Art'" (441-450)

SPRING BREAK

Week X: Music and the Emotions

Tues., Apr. 2

Peter Kivy, "The Profundity of Music" (567-573)

Nick Zangwill, "Against Emotion: Hanslick Was Right about Music" (574-582)

Thurs., Apr. 4

Jenefer Robinson, "Listening with Emotion: How Our Emotions Help Us to Understand Music" (583-599)

Week XI: Popular ("Pop") Art Forms

Tues., Apr. 9

Noël Carroll, "Defining Mass Art" (607-622)

Thurs., Apr. 11

Jeanette Bicknell, "Just a Song? Exploring the Aesthetics of Popular Song Performance" (623-631)

Week XII: Popular ("Pop") Art Forms

Tues., Apr. 16

Aaron Meskin, "Comics as Literature?" (632-646)

Thurs., Apr. 18

Matthew Kieran, "The Vice of Snobbery: Aesthetic Knowledge, Justification and Virtue in Art Appreciation" (647-657)

Week XIII: Institutional vs. Functional Conceptions of Art

Tues., Apr. 23

George Dickie, "The New Institutional Theory of Art" (15-21)

OPTIONAL: Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld" (7-14)

Thurs., Apr. 25

Monroe C. Beardsley, "An Aesthetic Definition of Art" (22-29)

Week XIV: Art in Culture and Society

Tues., Apr. 30

Denis Dutton, "But They Don't Have Our Concept of Art" (30-42)

OPTIONAL: Dominic McIver Lopes, "Nobody Needs a Theory of Art" (43-53)

Thurs., May. 2

Catharine Abell, "Art: What it Is and Why it Matters" (54-65)
