

PHIL 1380: Aesthetics

Fall 2023 / MW :: 12.00-1.30 / PSYL A30

Professor: Errol Lord

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Office Hours: M 1.30-2.30 (in person), Friday 11.30-12.30 (mostly Zoom), and by appointment

1 Course Description and Aims

We all constantly engage with the aesthetic aspects of the world. We laugh at sitcoms, we become enraptured by music, we appreciate craft beer labels, we cringe at lifeless concrete buildings, we are puzzled by urinals called art, we are intrigued by terrifying Medieval hell-scapes.

Aesthetics is dedicated to understanding and theorizing about the aesthetic aspects of the world. Aestheticians (the philosopher kind, not the beauty parlor kind) seek to answer questions like the following: What does it take for something to be art? What does it take for something to be aesthetically good or bad? What does it take to appreciate what is aesthetically good or bad? What does it take to know that things have the aesthetic features they do? Do the moral aspects of works affect its aesthetic aspects? Do the moral failings of artists affect the aesthetic aspects of their work? What determines the meaning of works? What determines whether an interpretation of a work is a good one?

The course has three main aims:

- To develop an understanding of the major positions in contemporary aesthetics.
- To continue to develop the ability to critically engage with philosophical texts, the ability to clearly argue for a philosophical position, and competence with philosophical methodology.
- To become better appreciators of the aesthetic realm via the study of philosophical aesthetics.

2 Course Requirements

2.1 Texts

No books are required for the course. All of the readings will be available on the course's Canvas site, which can be found [here](#).

2.2 Assignments

The course will have a variety of assignments.

2.2.1 Weekly Reflections

Each week you are required to write a one page reflection on at least one item of aesthetic interest. You can tie these reflections back to philosophical themes in the course, although this is not a blanket requirement. Each week I will provide as many examples as I can find. You are welcome to write your reflections on these examples. You may also use items of your choosing. These reflections will be a pivotal tool when it comes to becoming better appreciators.

2.2.2 Papers

You will be required to write two 5-7 page papers. One of these papers will a critical engagement with at least one item of aesthetic interest housed in The Barnes. The other paper will be more straightforwardly philosophical.

2.2.3 Take Home Exams

There will be two take home exams. These will require you to answer several essay questions. The purpose of these is to test comprehension and to give you the opportunity to further refine your philosophical skills.

2.2.4 Participation

You are required to regularly participate in class. In so doing, you will be required to conform to David Chalmers' guidelines for respectful, constructive, and inclusive philosophical discussion. You can find them [here](#).

Now that we've moved online, there will be a new Canvas based discussion. Everyone is required to participate in this discussion.

2.2.5 Percentage Breakdown

Weekly Reflections	15%
First Paper	20%
Second Paper	20%
First Exam	15%
Second Exam	20%
Participation	10%

3 Schedule

3.1 Assignments

Late assignments will lose 5% per day they are late. If you have to miss class the day work is due because of religious commitments, you need to get in touch with both me within the first two weeks of class in order to set up an alternative arrangement. If you have to miss class when something is due because of an emergency, please contact me immediately to set up alternative arrangements (documentation will need to be provided to avoid late penalties).

Weekly Reflections	Every Sunday by 5 pm
First Exam	9.29
First Paper	10.29
Second Exam	11.19
Second Paper	12.18

3.2 Readings

Below is the schedule of readings. The readings are available [here](#).

Date	Subject	Reading
8.30	What is Aesthetics?	None
9.6	Interpretation	Sontag, 'Against Interpretation' Nehamas, 'Art, Interpretation, and the Rest of Life'
9.11		Kieran, 'In Defense of Critical Pluralism' recommended: Wimsatt and Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy'
9.13		Irvin, 'Authors, Intentions, and Literary Meaning'
9.18		Stalnaker, 'Intention and Interpretation: Manet's <i>Luncheon in the Studio</i> '
9.20	Criticism	Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste'
9.25		Grant, 'The Aims of Art Criticism'
9.27		Isenberg, 'Critical Communication'
10.2	Metaphysics: Formalism	Bell, 'The Aesthetic Hypothesis' Eaton, 'Kantian and Contextual Beauty'
10.4		Walton, 'Categories of Art' recommended: Laetz, 'Kendall Walton's "Categories of Art": A Critical Commentary'
10.9		Zangwill, 'In Defense of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism'
10.11		Stalnaker, 'Fakes and Forgeries'
10.16	Visit Barnes	
10.18	Metaphysics: Ontology of the Arts	Levinson, 'What a Musical Work Is'
10.23		Ribeiro, 'The Spoken and the Written: An Ontology of Poems'
10.25		Lord, 'Can I Read Rilke?'
10.30	Metaphysics: Moralism	Gaut, 'The Ethical Criticism of Art'
11.1		Eaton, 'Robust Immoralism'
11.6		<i>Aesthetics for Birds</i> roundtable on morally bad artists Nussbaum, 'Confessions of the Human Shield'
11.8	Metaphysics: What is Art?	Cohen, 'High and Low Thoughts on High and Low Art'
11.13		Abell, 'Art: What it Is and Why It Matters' recommended: Danto, 'The Artworld'
11.15		Gaut, 'Art as a Cluster Concept'
11.20		Shelley, 'The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art'
11.27		Riggle, 'Street Art'

11.29	Learning about Art	Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts'
12.4		Lord, 'The Nature of Perceptual Expertise and the Rationality of Criticism'
12.6	Art and a Meaningful Life	Plato, selections from the <i>Symposium</i>
12.11		Nehamas, "Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Life Worth Living," Plato, <i>Symposium</i> 211d'

4 Course Policies

Academic honesty is fundamental to our community. Please read our Code of Academic Integrity. It can be found in the Pennbook ([here](#)). Any suspicious activity will be thoroughly investigated. A confirmed violation of the Code in this course will very likely result in failure for the course.

Here are some other noteworthy policies:

- In compliance with Penn policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Requests for academic accommodations need to be made during the first two weeks of the semester, except under unusual circumstances, to arrange reasonable accommodations. Students must register with Student Disabilities Services (SDS) for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.
- Cell phones must be put away during class (and obviously should be put in silent or vibrate mode). Do not text in class.
- Please make every effort to show up on time. More importantly, do not leave class early without informing me first.
- I will reply to emails within 48 hours. If I don't reply within 48 hours, please send me a reminder. Unless circumstances are unusual, I will not reply to substantive philosophical questions over email. It will be better for us all if you come to my office to discuss philosophy (it's much more fun/efficient). A good rule of thumb is that you should only email me questions that can be answered in 1-2 sentences.