

Aesthetics

PHIL-UA 60. Summer 2024, Second Session. Credits: 4.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 9:30 – 11:05 AM.

Room 302, Philosophy Department, 5 Washington Place.

Instructor: Carl Christian Abrahamsen

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Email policy: I am happy to answer logistical questions over email. For questions about course material, please come to my office hours.

Office hours:

Time: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11:15 – 12:15.

Location: Room 414, Philosophy Department, 5 Washington Place.

Office hours are your chance to talk more about the course material or about philosophy in general. You do not need to have a well-formed question to come to office hours; you can just show up, and we can have a chat. If you cannot make the above times, I am also happy to set up alternate meeting times.

Course description:

Plato spoke of an “ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry” (*Republic*, 607b5–6), and he, unsurprisingly, took the side of philosophy; the works of poets, he said, “maim the thought of those who hear them” (*Republic*, 607b5–6; 595b). In this course, we will begin with Plato’s arguments and then go on to consider a variety of accounts of both the nature and the value of art. Is art, as Plato seems to have thought, a pale and distorted alternative to philosophy? Might art offer us a distinctive form of insight that philosophy cannot? Or might it offer us something different: a guide to the good life, an encounter with the reality of other people, or a way to articulate our inner life? Along the way, we will also consider some of central philosophical questions raised by art, such as whether aesthetic value is subjective or objective, and what determines the meaning of an artwork.

Course aims:

This course has three aims. First, as a philosophy course, a central aim is to develop your ability to analyze, critically engage with, and construct arguments and theories. Second, the course aims to hone your skills in reading, interpreting, and explaining difficult texts. Most of our discussion and assignments will involve closely reading and trying to make sense of various texts. Finally, I aim to give you the tools to better understand and reflect on your own experiences with art. Many of the philosophical concepts or problems we will discuss in this class are ones that you will already have encountered, in implicit form, in ordinary aesthetic life: in disagreeing with friends over whether something is beautiful, for example, or in trying to understand your intense emotional reaction to an artwork. Hopefully, this course will equip you to better make sense of what is at stake in these experiences.

Assignments:

Your grade will be based on the following:

Participation: 10%

You are expected to attend and contribute to each class. Attendance counts for 5% of your total grade and active contribution to discussion counts for an additional 5%. You can miss up to 2 class without excuse.

Reading reflections: 20%

Each week, you will hand in a short (~1 page) reflection on one of the readings. In your reflection, you will briefly explain a key idea or concept in the text and then respond to this idea in your own voice. Responding to the idea could involve:

- (a) Asking a question about how to understand the idea
- (b) Objecting to the idea
- (c) Providing an original example which illustrates the idea
- (d) Anything else that demonstrates critical engagement with the idea

Reflections are graded Pass/Fail. You can write your reflection on any paper or text, but **the reflection must be submitted before the start of the class in which**

we discuss that paper. If, by the end of the week, you have not submitted a reflection on any of the readings, you will receive a Fail for that week. There will be no reflections due on weeks where you also have papers due.

Papers: 40%

Paper 1 (due July 22nd): 1000-1400 words (4-6 pages) – 15%

Paper 2 (due August 5th): 1400-1800 words (6-8 pages) – 25%

Exam: 30%

There will be an in-class exam on the final day of class. The exam will cover all the material for the course and will consist of concept identification questions, short-answer questions, and essay questions. You can bring 2 pages of handwritten notes with you to the exam.

Course Policies:

Academic integrity: I take academic integrity seriously. The work you submit must be original, and it must be your own. Likewise, any sources you use must be properly quoted and cited. Failure to follow these rules can result in an F on the assignment or you failing the course. For more guidelines on academic integrity, see <https://cas.nyu.edu/academic-integrity.html>. *Note that it is plagiarism to use text generated by an AI program such as ChatGPT.*

Accessibility: I am committed to making my classroom accessible to all students. If you have any concerns or questions about accessibility, please contact me.

Academic accommodations, for example alternative exam rooms or extra exam time, are available for students with disabilities or other accessibility needs. Your go-to resource for accommodations is the Moses Center, and you can submit an accommodation request at <https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/student-accessibility/academic.html>. You can also contact them directly at 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu. In my experience, the Moses Center is often slow to respond, so it is a good idea to get in touch with them as early as possible.

Electronics: I do not allow electronics in the classroom, as I find it severely obstructs discussion. I will make exceptions in case of an accessibility need.

Extensions and late penalties: I am happy to grant extensions on papers if for some reason you are unable to meet the original deadline, for example because you are sick or because the deadline falls on a religious holiday that you observe. If you are going to request an extension, please contact me as far in advance of the deadline as possible. Also, keep in mind that the summer semester is short, and it is easy to fall behind if you do not submit your coursework on time.

For late papers, the grade penalty is 1/3rd of a letter grade per day. For example, a B paper that is one day late becomes a B- paper, and an A paper that is three days late becomes a B paper.

Missed exams: Since the final exam is during class time, it will not be possible to take a make-up exam except in cases of exceptional need.

Additional resources:

Online resources: The following are useful online resources:

- <https://plato.stanford.edu/>
 - The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy contains high quality articles on several subjects and authors we will discuss in this course. Particularly useful entries include: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-judgment/>, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-concept/>, and <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume-aesthetics/>.
- <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
 - This is a great guideline for how to write a philosophy paper, especially if you have never written one before.

Student wellness: The NYU [Wellness Exchange](#) is the constellation of NYU's programs and services designed to address the overall health and mental health needs of its students. Students can access this service 24 hours a day, seven days a week at wellness.exchange@nyu.edu or (212) 443-9999. Students can call the Wellness Exchange hotline (212-443-9999) or the NYU Counseling Service (212-998-4780) to make an appointment for Single Session, Short-term, or Group counseling sessions.

Writing center: The NYU Writing Center is open during the summer. You can make an appointment at <https://nyu.mywconline.com/>.

Readings:

All readings will be available on Brightspace. There is on average 20 pages of reading for each day. I expect you to come to class each day having done the reading and ready to discuss it. But that does not mean you need to have understood it. Often, the best contributions to a class discussion involve voicing a confusion or difficulty you had in making sense of the text.

Class Schedule:

Week 0: Introduction

July 3rd – Introduction

July 4th – NO CLASS (Independence Day)

Week 1: The Nature of Art

July 8th – Excerpts from Plato, *The Republic*

July 9th – Excerpts from Tolstoy, *What is Art?*

July 10th – Excerpts from Bell, *Art*

July 11th – Danto, “The Artworld”

Week 2: Good Art, Bad Art, and Taste

July 15th – Horn, “The Tortured Poets Department” (review); Empire, “Taylor Swift: The Tortured Poets Department review” (plus, listen to enough of *The Tortured Poets Department* to have an opinion about whether you like it or not)

July 16th – Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”

July 17th – Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (§1 - §8)

July 18th – Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (§9 - §14, §18 - §20)

First paper due by Monday, July 22nd

Week 3: Aesthetic Concepts and The Function of Criticism

July 22nd – Isenberg, “Critical Communication”

July 23rd – Sibley, “Aesthetic Concepts”

July 24th – Walton, “Aesthetic Categories”

July 25th – Walton, “Aesthetic Categories” (second session)

Week 4: Interpretation and Meaning

July 29th – Kafka, “A Report to the Academy”; Dickinson, “I Felt a Funeral, in My Brain,”

July 30th – Barthes, “The Death of the Author”; Wimsatt and Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy”

July 31st – Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation”

August 1st – Sontag, “Against Interpretation”

Second paper due by Monday, August 5th

Week 5: Art and Ethics

August 5th – Aristotle, Excerpts from *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*

August 6th – Murdoch, “The Sublime and the Good”

August 7th – Nussbaum, “‘Finely Aware and Richly Responsible’: Moral Attention and the Moral Task of Literature”

August 8th – Class screening and discussion of *Paris, Texas*

Week 6: Evil Art

August 12th – Carroll, “Moderate Moralism”

August 13th – Dederer, “What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men?”

August 14th – NO CLASS (Legislative Friday)

August 15th – In-class exam