

Aesthetics and the Arts
Philosophy 327
Spring 2014

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Course Description

Aesthetics and the arts are central to our lives. We surround ourselves with things based on our aesthetic preferences, whether they are the automobiles we drive, the music to which we listen, the way we arrange our furniture, the jewelry, make-up, tattoos, clothes, or body piercings with which we adorn ourselves, the posters we hang in on our walls, photographs we choose to display, movies we see and talk about with our friends, and on and on. Often we decide to take up some sort of artistic endeavor ourselves, such as photography, playing guitar, quilting, knitting, chainsaw carving, painting, or writing poetry. In many ways we express the deepest parts of our identities through these artistic choices, for we often define ourselves through them. We announce for all the world to see that we embrace one set of aesthetic values as opposed to others. These choices express our generation, region, class, gender, culture, nation, social group, or other important aspects of who we are; often they express other aspects of human existence as well.

Typically, however, we do not try to interpret what these choices mean, even when we have decided to invest considerable amounts of time, money, effort, and significance into them. To remedy this gap in our understanding, this course will focus on the intersection of these questions concerning meaning, pleasure, evaluation, and the arts by examining the following topics:

- what is art?
- what is aesthetic experience?
- what roles do reason, the emotions, and pleasure play in appreciation of the arts?
- what is the philosophy of pop culture, particularly as it pertains to moving pictures?

Through course readings, discussions, lectures, examination of select art objects, and writing assignments, we will seek to develop a better sense of aesthetics and the arts' places in our lives.

Required Texts

- Cahn, Steven, and Aaron Meskin (eds.) *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology* (Blackwell, 2008).
- Carroll, Noël, *Minerva's Night Out: Philosophy, Pop Culture, and Moving Pictures* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).
- Warburton, Nigel, *The Art Question* (Routledge, 2003).
- e-reserve readings and handouts to be made available on D2L.

Required Assignments

- one mini-research essay (6-8 pp., double spaced): 30%
- two mid-term exams: 15% each
- five reading quizzes: 20%
- participation and industry in class: 20%

Interpretation of Grades

Letter grades in the course will be awarded according to the criteria described below:

- A** Achievement that is outstanding relative to basic course requirements—for example, written work that conveys a superior understanding of the material and is free of grammatical errors. Has a special quality—for example, an essay that provides particularly insightful analysis, criticism, or reflection.
- B** Achievement that is significantly higher than basic course requirements; e.g., a well-written and well-produced essay. May contain a few minor flaws that could be overcome without difficulty. Shows a solid understanding of the material.
- C** Achievement that fulfills basic course requirements. However, may contain significant flaws—e.g., an essay that fulfills the assignment's basic requirements, but does not do it in a clear or noteworthy way. Shows some understanding of the material, but presents it partially, incompletely, or awkwardly. May fail to address properly one or more major assignment requirements. Awkward handling of source materials may be in evidence. May contain grammatical errors or clumsy writing that interfere with the essay's readability.
- D** Achievement that is worthy of course credit, but is not satisfactory. For example, an essay that forces the reader to do far too much work to understand it, due to numerous and/or serious grammatical errors, incomplete or inadequate presentation of materials, poor reasoning, or poor writing. May also fail to address properly one or more major assignment requirements, without which the essay fails to address the primary aims of the assignment.
- F** Achievement not worthy of course credit.

Other Course Policies and Information

Academic Dishonesty. All work for this course must be written by the person submitting it for evaluation. It must also be written for **this** course. These requirements include anything submitted for credit in the class. **Anyone found guilty of plagiarism, cheating, forgery, or other forms of academic dishonesty will fail this course** and the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students. (See the *MSU Student Conduct Guidelines* for further information.)

Academic Philosophical Resources. For your research essays for this course (see below), you **must** use academic philosophical resources. Usually, an academic philosophical resource is an essay published in a recognized philosophy journal, a recognizably philosophical anthology, a philosophy book, and/or is listed in *The Philosopher's Index* (see below). Academic philosophical essays and books typically have footnotes or endnotes, explore concepts or theories in extended depth (i.e., for several pages), focus on argument or conceptual analysis, and have the sort of character possessed by the books and essays we will read for this course. (**Note: book reviews and encyclopedia articles do not count as academic philosophical resources**). Typically, but not always, they are written by professional philosophers. **For the purposes of this course, the academic philosophical resource you use for your research paper must be listed in *The Philosopher's Index*.**

Assigned Readings. Philosophy requires a solid comprehension of texts. My assumption is that you will make every effort to **read the assigned material twice and come to class prepared to discuss it**. The best way to achieve the comprehension needed to discuss philosophy texts intelligently is to **read the material carefully and more than once**: first for an overall grasp, then a second or additional times (generally more slowly) for a deeper, more detailed understanding.

Attendance, Participation, and Industry. A portion of your grade (20%) will depend on your **active participation and industry in class**, which I will take to be illustrated by **thoughtful discussion, comments, and questions** regarding the course's topics and materials. This aspect of your grade **presupposes regular attendance**. Missing numerous class sessions (i.e., three or more) should lead to the expectation that your grade will be negatively affected, and missing **twelve** or more (i.e., 30% or more of the course) for **any** reason should lead to the expectation that you will not do satisfactorily or, in extreme cases, not pass the class. In addition, only rarely or never saying anything in class should lead to the expectation that your grade may be negatively affected.

Other Course Policies and Information (continued)

Copies. Make copies of your submitted work and keep them until you receive your final grade.

Course Prerequisite. This course **presupposes that you have already had at least one course in philosophy and** thus have a solid general understanding of what philosophy is as a form of disciplinary knowledge. If you have not yet taken any philosophy courses, you are not prepared for this course and should probably drop it.

E-reserve and Online Readings. Some of the course readings will be made available to you through the D2L or are accessible online through various databases. **These readings are required texts** for this course. As such, you will need to **print out and bring them to class** so that we may study and discuss them in detail.

Essay Format. Your written, out-of-class assignments for this course must be word-processed and clearly readable in 10 to 12 point font. Space the lines as instructed, use approximately one-half to one-inch margins, place your name, assignment description, and course and section number in an upper corner of the first page, title your essay, number your pages, use a standard citation format, and staple or paper clip multiple-page essays together. There is no need for cover or backing sheets, plastic binders, folders, etc.

Incompletes. Incomplete grades are generally for students who become ill or have other emergencies late in the semester. Students eligible for Incompletes should have consistently completed four-fifths of the assigned work during the semester in a timely fashion. If you feel you merit an Incomplete, talk to be about it ASAP.

Late Papers. Late assignments are generally frowned upon, may receive a lower grade than they would otherwise, or **may not be accepted** for credit. If you have difficulty meeting a deadline, contact me ASAP.

Mature Content. Some of the films we will consider in this course contain mature (i.e., “R”-rated) content. If you are unable to tolerate this kind of material, you should take some other course.

Mini-Research Essays. A mini-research essay is a small-scale academic research essay that further develops the philosophical analysis of some topic we have discussed in class. In addition to course materials, it also incorporates independent research. The purpose of this kind of essay is to help you to take a topic we have discussed and analyzed and independently develop the philosophical discussion of it. This type of assignment requires you to show not only a competence in the topic as we have discussed and analyzed it (namely, by **citing and discussing in some detail at least two essays we have covered in this course**), but also to extend its **philosophical analysis** by means of **independent academic research**. In keeping with this purpose, mini-research essays must use in some significant way **at least two academic philosophical resources** (see above) that discuss this topic beyond the ways in which we have discussed it in the course. The best papers, all things being equal, will probably incorporate more than two resources from outside class readings.

Research Resources. A number of research resources for philosophy, containing articles and books that may be used for writing essays in this course, are owned or licensed by the Montana State University – Bozeman Library system. These resources may be identified and in many cases accessed on-line through the MSU Library system’s databases; in other cases you may obtain these materials physically from the books and journals the MSU Library system owns, or you may borrow them through Interlibrary Loan (ILL). In particular, your research into topics arising in this course will be greatly facilitated by **The Philosopher’s Index database**, to which the MSU Library system offers access on-line.

Other Course Policies and Information (continued)

Reading Quizzes. Several reading quizzes will be given during the semester to ensure that you are reading the course materials carefully. **Quizzes will be given without warning during the first five minutes of class and may not be made up.** A total of six quizzes will be given; if you have taken all of them, your lowest score may be dropped.

Required Texts. This course is about the **analysis of texts**. The assigned readings exist in books or online resources that you **must have with you on the days we discuss them**. As such, if you come to class without these texts on the relevant days, you will be counted as **absent**.

Schedule of topics and assignments

- 8 January Introduction to the course: aesthetics and the arts
Recommended: Kristeller, "Introduction," in Cahn and Meskin (eds.), *Aesthetics*, 3-15;
Warburton, *The Art Question*, 1-6
- Traditional Theories of Art and the Aesthetic**
- 10, 13 January Art, aesthetics, and the concept of 'Beauty'
Reading: Plato, "Republic," in *Aesthetics*, 24-33;
Plato, "Symposium," in *Aesthetics*, 34-40;
Plotinus, "Ennead I, vi," in *Aesthetics*, 57-63;
Shaftsbury, "Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times," in *Aesthetics*, 77-86
- 15 January Art as knowledge
Reading: Aristotle, "Poetics," in *Aesthetics*, 41-56
- 17 January Aesthetics and the arts as forms of pleasure and "taste"
Reading: Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Aesthetics*, 103-112;
Hume, "Of National Characters," fn. 10, in David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, Revised Edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987), p. 208 (on **D2L** as "HumeonRace.pdf"; **print out & bring to class**)
- 20 January **Martin Luther King Day – No class**
- 22 January A Contemporary Response to Hume
Reading: Eaton, "Robust Immoralism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70 (2012), 281-92 (**D2L; print out & bring to class**)
Reread: Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Aesthetics*, 111-112
- 24-27 January Aesthetics and the arts as pleasures in judgments of the beautiful
Reading: "Critique of Judgement," in *Aesthetics*, 131-46;
Kant on Civilization, Race, Beauty, and Human Perfection (handout) (**D2L; print out & bring to class**)
- 29 January Critique of 'beauty'
Reading: Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Aesthetics*, 327-43
- 29 January Critique of 'taste'
Reading: Mothersill, "Beauty Restored," in *Aesthetics*, 509-20

Schedule of topics and assignments (continued)

- 31 January Aesthetics and the arts as expressions of emotion
Reading: Nietzsche, “The Birth of Tragedy,” in *Aesthetics*, 222-32;
- 3 February Aesthetics and the arts as expressions of emotion
Reading: Tolstoy, “What is Art?” in *Aesthetics*, 233-42
- 5 February A Feminist Critique of the Philosophic Fear of Fashion
Reading: Hanson, “Dressing Down Dressing Up—the Philosophic Fear of Fashion,” *Hypatia* 5 (1990), 107-121 (**D2L; print out & bring to class**)
- 7 February Aesthetics and women
Reading: Devereaux, “Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers, and the Gendered Spectator: The ‘New’ Aesthetics,” in *Aesthetics*, 651-63
Review for Midterm #1
- 10 February **Midterm #1**
- Is It Possible to Define Art?**
- 12 February Art as significant form
Reading: Bell, “Art,” in *Aesthetics*, 261-69
- 14 February Critique of Bell
Reading: Warburton, *The Art Question*, 9-35
- 17 February **Presidents’ Day – No class**
- 19 February Art as expression
Reading: Collingwood, “The Principles of Art,” in *Aesthetics*, 282-95
- 21 February Critique of Collingwood
Reading: Warburton, *The Art Question*, 37-62
- 24 February The Impossibility of Defining Art
Reading: “Wittgenstein on language-games,” from *Philosophical Investigations*, paragraphs 65-75 [pdf on e-reserve; **print out and bring to class**]; Weitz, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,” in *Aesthetics*, 409-16
- 26 February Wittgensteinian “Family Resemblances” and Weitz’s Theory
Reading: Warburton, *The Art Question*, 65-85
- 28 February Institutional Theories of Art: Danto
Reading: Danto, “The Artworld,” in *Aesthetics*, 417-25
- 3 March Institutional Theories of Art: Dickie
Reading: Dickie, “What is Art? An Institutional Analysis,” in *Aesthetics*, 426-37
- 5 March Critique of Dickie’s Institutional Theory
Reading: Warburton, *The Art Question*, 87-112
- 7 March Institutional Theories of Art: Levinson
Reading: Levinson, “Defining Art Historically,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19 (1979), 232-50 [on e-reserve; **print out and bring to class**]; Warburton, *The Art Question*, 112-118

Schedule of topics and assignments (continued)

- 10-14 March **Spring Break—No classes**
- 17 March Warburton’s Theory of Art
Reading: Warburton, *The Art Question*, 121-133
- 19 March Piecemeal Theorizing About Art
Reading: Robinson, “Style and Personality in the Literary Work,” in *Aesthetics*, 616-27
Review for Midterm #2
- 21 March **Midterm #2**
- The Philosophy of Popular Culture**
- 24 March The Philosophy of Mass Art
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 1-28
- 26 March Art and the Plasticity of Perception
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 29-39
- 28 March Emotions and Popular Fiction
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 40-63
- 31 March Fictional Characters and Social Information
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 64-81
- 2 April Movies and the Moral Emotions
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 85-105
- 4 April The Problem with Movie Stars
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 106-121
- 7 April Cinematic Narrative and Cinematic Narration
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 122-44
- 9 April Psychoanalysis and Horror Films
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 145-57
- 11 April Film as Philosophy: *Sunset Boulevard*
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 161-82
- 14 April *Vertigo* and Romantic Love
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 183-93
- 16 April Film as Philosophy: *Memento*
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 203-219
- 18 April **University Day Holiday – No class**
- 21 April Sympathy for Evil Characters?
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 234-46
- 23 April Carrie Bradshaw as Moral Advisor?
Reading: Carroll, *Minerva’s Night Out*, 247-66
- 25 April **Final paper due**