

# Aesthetics

PHIL-UA 60, Summer 2021

Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays 11:30-1:05

## Course Instructor

Joshua Myers

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Office Hours: Thursdays from 2:00-3:30pm, or by appt.

## Course Description

In this course we will think philosophically about art and aesthetic value. The course will be organized around a number of foundational questions in analytic aesthetics: What makes something art? What is the metaphysical status of artworks? Why do we respond emotionally to fiction? What does it take for an aesthetic judgment to be correct? What are the social and ethical implications of our everyday aesthetic judgments? Along the way we will consider issues and examples that draw from a diverse array of art forms, such as painting, classical and popular music, theatre, photography, literature, conceptual art, food, sculpture, and film.

## Course Goals

- (1) Gain an understanding of central issues and positions in contemporary aesthetics
- (2) Practice reading and critically evaluating philosophical texts
- (3) Enhance philosophical writing skills
- (4) Develop original viewpoints and evaluate arguments through discussion

## Requirements and Grading

**Active Participation (25%):** One of the best ways to practice doing philosophy is by engaging in discussion and dialogue, and by working through difficult ideas with your peers. Because of this, I expect students to actively participate each class by asking and answering questions, registering the ideas you are confused about, and engaging with the points raised by your classmates. You can also participate by sending relevant artistic examples the day before that we can discuss the next day in class. Attendance counts towards this portion of your grade. Students automatically receive one excused absence. More than three unexcused absences will result in failing the course.

**Four Reading Responses (20%):** You will turn in four 1 page (~400 words) reading responses throughout the course, each worth 5% of your grade. You should submit no more than 1 reading response a week (since there are 6 weeks in the course, this means you may take 2 weeks off). Each reading response should focus on one reading from that week and (1) clearly state the main thesis that the author argues for, (2) summarize the argument that the author gives for that thesis, and (3) briefly evaluate the argument by raising an objection, noting any unclarities, or mentioning some of its strengths. One of your four reading responses may respond to an optional, alternative prompt that I will distribute in class. Reading responses are due on Sundays at 5pm.

**Midterm Paper (20%):** Students will turn in a 3-5 page (1000-1500 words) paper at the end of the third week of the course. The paper will be on a topic assigned by the instructor.

**Final Paper (35%):** Students will turn in a 5-7 page (1500-2000 words) paper at the end of the course (worth 30%), with an outline due at the end of the fifth week (worth 5%). Your midterm and final paper should not be on the same topic.

**Disability Accommodation:** Students who need accommodation for a disability should consult with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities: <https://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/students-with-disabilities>.

## Reading Schedule

### Week 1: Definitions of Art

Monday 5/24: Bell "Art" Chapter 1, Part 1 (Parts 2 and 3 are optional)

Tuesday 5/25: Weitz "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics"

Wednesday 5/26: Danto "The Artworld"

Thursday 5/27: Dickie "What is Art? An Institutional Analysis"

### Week 2: Definitions and Ontology

Tuesday 6/1: Levinson "Defining Art Historically"

Wednesday 6/2: Davies "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition"

Thursday 6/3: Wollheim "Art and its Objects" Sections 1-8, 20-23, 35-37

### Week 3: Ontology of Art

Monday 6/7: Levinson "What a Musical Work Is"

Tuesday 6/8: Dodd "Musical Works as Eternal Types"

Wednesday 6/9: Kania "Making Tracks: The Ontology of Rock Music"

Thursday 6/10: Irvin "The Ontological Diversity of Visual Artworks"

*Midterm paper due on Friday 6/11 at 5pm*

### Week 4: Aesthetic Value

Monday 6/14: Hume "On the Standard of Taste"

Tuesday 6/15: Nguyen "Autonomy and Aesthetic Engagement"

Wednesday 6/16: Dyck & Johnson "Appreciating Bad Art"

Thursday 6/17: Eaton "Aesthetic Obligations"

### Week 5: Fiction and Emotion

Monday 6/21: Radford "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?"

Tuesday 6/22: Walton "Fearing Fictions"

Wednesday 6/23: Gendler "Genuine Rational Fictional Emotions"

Thursday 6/24: Song "Aptness of Fiction-Directed Emotions"

*Final paper outline due on Friday 6/25 at 5 pm*

### Week 6: Everyday Aesthetics and its Social and Ethical Implications

Monday 6/28: Irvin "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience"

Tuesday 6/29: Saito "Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making" Chapters 2 + 6

Wednesday 6/30: Loftis "Three Problems for Aesthetic Foundations of Environmental Ethics"

Thursday 7/1: Irvin "Resisting Body Oppression: An Aesthetic Approach"

*Final paper due on Monday 7/5 at 5pm*