

**DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGES**

Texas A &amp; M University - Commerce

Fall 2012

**PHILOSOPHY 362.01W: AESTHETICS****Section: 82289**

Professor: Dr. Jason Boaz Simus

E-mail: [jbsimus@gmail.com](mailto:jbsimus@gmail.com).

Phone: 940-230-3624

Office hours: virtual hours daily

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In this course we will examine and discuss some of the fundamental questions, ideas, and concepts central to aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Along the way we will address questions such as: What makes something a work of art? Are judgments about art objective? Or are they simply matters of taste? Is one artistic or aesthetic judgment as good as another? Are artworks objects or experiences? What are the standards of art criticism?

**What we're trying to do in this course:** This is not just a venue for us to express our individual opinions (for example, "I believe X, I believe Y"). To do that is really to only talk about ourselves. And while it is true that "everyone is entitled to their beliefs," it is not true that all beliefs are equally correct, because some beliefs are unjustified, incorrect, or simply false. That is, some beliefs are better than others. With that in mind, our investigation should aim at the truth—what most rational, reasonable people would collectively agree is the justified, right, or correct belief to adopt on a given philosophical topic (for example, "believing X is justified for the following reasons..."). And although there may not be definite answers to philosophical questions (for example, of the kind we find in mathematics), there are answers to philosophical questions nonetheless. The difference is that answers to philosophical questions come in the form of good arguments, and we should accept a philosophical view based only on the merits of the arguments presented in its favor, not on whether it confirms our already held beliefs.

**If you are struggling:** I am more than willing to help, but I cannot help you if I don't know you are struggling or have questions. So ask questions. Ask for help. Don't struggle silently! Even if you are so confused you can't seem to formulate a question, let me know so I can at least point you in the right direction.

**A word about grading:** Although in philosophy we deal with many different points of view, your work will be evaluated only according to how well it satisfies the grading criteria for each assignment that is outlined in the syllabus. And while I may offer a variety of different views on a given subject, please do not assume that these are *my* views. Out of respect for you as students, I will not advocate my personal views or grade your assignments accordingly. As your instructor, I am obligated to evaluate your performance as impartially and as objectively as possible. And please do not take your grades personally. Here we will be discussing some controversial and at times disturbing ideas, ideas that you

may not have considered, or ideas that may throw your previously held beliefs into doubt. Rest assured that your grade will not be based on what you believe. Your work will be evaluated only according to how well it satisfies the grading criteria outlined in the course syllabus. In short, I do not *give* grades, I only record the grades you earn.

### STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. To acquire an overview of the field of aesthetics and philosophy of art.
2. To distinguish arguments from explanations, and from statements of unsupported opinion.
3. To distinguish between descriptive statements (what is the case) and normative statements (what ought to be the case).
4. To learn to identify, understand, analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments regarding topics in aesthetics and philosophy of art.
5. To develop writing skills with emphasis on clarity, organization, concision, coherence, and consistency.
6. To practice the virtues of intellectual and academic integrity: accountability, perseverance, honesty, rigor, and fairness.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Thomas E. Wartenberg, *The Nature of Art: An Anthology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Belmont, CA, Thomson Wadsworth, 2007). **ISBN-13: 978-111-11865-24.**
2. Margaret Battin, John Fisher, Ronald Moore, and Anita Silvers, eds., *Puzzles About Art: An Aesthetics Casebook* (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1989). **ISBN-13: 978-312-00307-4.**

### GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Final grades will be based on 25 text (Wartenberg) study question responses (50%, 2 points each), 3 exam essays (30%, 10 points each), and participation on online discussion board (20%, 1 point each for regular posts, 2 points each for artwork analysis posts). Late assignments will not be accepted. Grading scale: (90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D; below 60 = F).

### TEXT STUDY QUESTION RESPONSES

Text study question responses help students develop the ability to (1) understand and respond to questions that are central to an author's argument, and (2) express that understanding in clear and concise writing.

We will cover two readings per week in *The Nature of Art* (except on exam weeks). Carefully read the assigned article, select any one of the study questions on that article from the text, and submit a clear, concise, and coherent response (at least 5 sentences, 1 page maximum) to the appropriate dropbox in our eCollege course shell. Responses to study questions must be submitted as word document attachments no later than 5pm Friday for that week. Late submissions will not be accepted.

### EXAM ESSAYS

Exams help students develop the ability to (1) understand and evaluate arguments, (2) construct and defend an argument, and (3) acknowledge and respond to objections to your argument.

For each exam essay you will select any single suitable case study from *Puzzles About Art* and write a 3-4 page essay (750-1000 words) in response to the questions raised by the case study you have selected. Your essay will be evaluated according to how well you follow the criteria below (each criterion counts 2 points).

1. In an introductory paragraph, indicate which case study you are addressing and correctly cite at least one **author** from the current readings in *The Nature of Art* (for example, how might author X respond to the question posed by your selected case study?).
2. At the end of your introductory paragraph, provide a clear and explicitly stated **thesis** (i.e., the main claim you plan to defend throughout your essay).
3. In the next paragraph(s), present a clear and thorough **argument** in defense of your thesis. Give reasons in support of your claims.
4. In the following paragraph, present one clear and thorough **objection** to your thesis.
5. In a concluding paragraph, provide a clear **response** to the objection.

Prepare well in advance. Read the chapter from which you select your case study in *Puzzles About Art*. It will significantly help you develop your essay. The authors you refer to in your essays must be current (weeks 1-5, 7-10, and 12-15, respectively). You must select a different case study for each exam. When citing references, use the parenthetical citations—reference list style (see [www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)). Exam essays must be submitted to the appropriate dropbox as word document attachments no later than 5pm Friday during exam week. Late submissions will not be accepted.

### ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARD

The student lounge online discussion board helps students develop the ability to (1) engage in productive dialogue and debate on philosophical topics, and (2) to express their views clearly and respectfully.

**Regular discussion board posts:** I will regularly post comments and questions on the online discussion board in our course shell. Participation will be evaluated on how many times you post a thoughtful response on the discussion board. You will earn one point of credit for each response you submit up to 10 responses. Discussion board posts must be on the topics we are currently studying and must be submitted before the exam concluding that section.

**Artwork analysis posts:** you may also post an example of a work that you find philosophically interesting (audio, video, photo, print, etc.), and answer the questions listed below. Give reasons in defense of your answers. For each post you will earn 2 points up to 10 points.

1. What makes it a work of art?
2. Is it a *good* work of art? Why or why not?

3. What are its qualities (e.g., bright, cheerful, dark, gloomy, elegant, clumsy, etc.)?
4. What are its values (social, cultural, aesthetic, political, educational, etc.)?

**Discussion board post replies:** You can post several types of replies to the week's readings or to other posts or comments on our site. Here are some examples.

1. Clarification request. You claim p (a proposition), but I don't know what you mean by saying p. Please clarify. Do you mean by this p1, p2...?
2. Argument request. You claim p. I think I know what you mean by p. But why do you claim p? I don't see any argument for p, and I think you need to give an argument for it.
3. Objection. You claim p (and maybe you argue for it). However, I think that p, (or your argument for p), is problematic. Here's my objection to p (or to your argument for p): q. What do you say in response to q?
4. Assistance. You claim p. I agree with you that p, but I think the following additional reason (which you do not mention) can be given in support of p: q.
5. Competing interpretation. You say that the reading claims that p. However, I don't think that this is exactly what it says. Instead, I think it says q (and here's why I think this).
6. Suggestion of parallels. You claim p. P (or your argument for p) reminds me of so-and-so's claim that q (or his argument for q). Are the two really similar? Does comparing p to q help illuminate p, or is it just misleading?

### ONLINE COURSE CONTRACT

Click on that tab in our eCollege course shell, print your name on the contract, and return it to me in the dropbox provided by **Friday of Week 1**. First you must save it to your computer as a Word doc, save it, then upload it to the dropbox.

### RESOURCES

I will post resource links under "doc sharing" and "webliography." Plan to use the [www.chicagomanualofstyle.org](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org) site for documentation format and stylistic guidelines, or try the library or the Writing Center in the Department of Literature and Languages. The Writing Center is eager to help you with your written work. For info, see <http://web.tamuccommerce.edu/academics/colleges/artsSciences/departments/literatureLanguages/writingCenter/>. Also, check out <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/> for guidelines to Research and Documentation Online. For help in the library, please contact Craig Wheeler, Humanities Librarian, 903.886.5719, [Craig\\_wheeler@tamuccommerce.edu](mailto:Craig_wheeler@tamuccommerce.edu) and MSN Live: [refhead@live.com](mailto:refhead@live.com)

### TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

This course will be conducted within eCollege which works best within a Microsoft Windows environment, and requires a high speed internet connection (not dial-up). This means you

should use a Windows operating system (XP or newer) and a recent version of Microsoft Internet Explorer (6.0, 7.0, or 8.0). The course will also work with Macintosh OS X along with a recent version of Safari (2.0 or better). eCollege also supports the Firefox/Mozilla (3.0 or better) on both Windows and Mac operating systems. It is strongly recommended that you perform a "Browser Test" prior to the start of your course. To launch a browser test, login to eCollege, click on the 'myCourses' tab, and then select the "Browser Test" link under Support Services. To get started with the course, go to: <https://leo.tamu-commerce.edu/login.aspx>. You will need your CWID and password to log in to the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact Technology Services at 903.468.6000 or [helpdesk@tamu-commerce.edu](mailto:helpdesk@tamu-commerce.edu).]

### **CONTACTING eCOLLEGE FOR TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

The following support options are available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week:

- **Help:** Click on the '*Help*' button on the toolbar for information regarding working with eCollege (i.e. How to submit to dropbox, How to post to discussions etc...)
- **Chat Support:** Click on '*Live Support*' on the tool bar within your course to chat with an eCollege Representative.
- **Phone:** 1-866-656-5511 (Toll Free) to speak with eCollege Technical Support Representative.
- **Email:** [helpdesk@online.tamuc.org](mailto:helpdesk@online.tamuc.org) to initiate a support request with eCollege Technical Support Representative.

### **STATEMENTS TO STUDENTS REQUIRED BY THE UNIVERSITY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGES**

- **Retention statement for 1<sup>st</sup> Year Students:** Grades for students in freshmen level classes will be reported to the Registrar's Office at the end of the fifth week of class during the fall and spring semesters. The Registrar's Office will report grades to students, Advising Services, Academic Departments (faculty advisors) and mentors. This procedure will allow students to be knowledgeable about their academic progress early in the semester. The university, through Advising Services, faculty advisors and mentors, will take steps to assist students who may be experiencing difficulty to focus on improvement and course completion. Early intervention for freshman students is designed to communicate to students the University's interest in their success and willingness to participate fully to help students accomplish their objectives.
- **Notice TExES/TOPT Statement:** Students who plan to teach English, Spanish, or English as a Second Language in Texas public schools must pass the appropriate state certification tests. The Department of Literature and Languages grants approval to take the content-area tests, subject to the policies described at this URL: <http://faculty.tamu-commerce.edu/bolin/texas.html>
- **Behavior:** All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment.

- **Americans with Disabilities Act Statement:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the **Office of Student Disability Resources and Services, TAMU-C, Gee Library, Rm 132; call (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835; Fax (903) 468-8148; [StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu](mailto:StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu)**
- **Plagiarism:** *Plagiarism* is borrowing the work of others and not giving credit where credit is due. It is unethical and reflects very poorly on a person's character. In short, resist the temptation. Instructors in the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension, and expulsion. (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b[1,2,3]). See the Plagiarism link at the tab in our eCollege course shell for more information.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### WEEK 1

**8/27-8/30**

1. Honer, et al., "What is Philosophy?" (in "doc sharing").
2. Honer, et al., "Philosophical Thinking" (in "doc sharing").
3. Wartenberg text Introduction, "What Makes Art Such a Problematic Concept?"

**These first three assignments and signed syllabus contract are due by Friday at 5pm.**

For the first two assignments ("What is Philosophy?" and "Philosophical Thinking," select any single "question to consider" at the beginning of each reading and provide a clear, thoughtful response that is at least 5 sentences in length. For the third assignment (the introduction to the Wartenberg text): Provide a brief summary (200 words). Submit to appropriate dropbox basket as word doc attachments.

### WEEK 2

**9/3-9/7**

4. Art as Imitation: Plato
5. Art as Cognition: Aristotle. **First text study question responses due Friday by 5pm.**

### WEEK 3

**9/10-9/14**

6. Art as Object of Taste: David Hume

7. Art as Communicable Pleasure: Immanuel Kant

**WEEK 4**

**9/17-9/21**

8. Art as Revelation: Arthur Schopenhauer

9. Art as the Ideal: G.W.F. Hegel

**WEEK 5**

**9/24-9/28**

10. Art as Redemption: Friedrich Nietzsche

11. Art as Communication of Feeling: Leo Tolstoy

**WEEK 6**

**10/1-10/5**

**EXAM 1 DUE**

**WEEK 7**

**10/8-10/12**

12. Art as Symptom: Sigmund Freud

13. Art as Significant Form: Clive Bell

**WEEK 8**

**10/15-10/19**

14. Art as Expression: R.G. Collingwood

15. Art as Experience: John Dewey

**WEEK 9**

**10/22-10/26**

16. Art as Indefinable: Morris Weitz

17. Art as Exemplification: Nelson Goodman

**WEEK 10**

**10/29-11/2**

18. Art as Theory: Arthur Danto

19. Art as Institution: George Dickie

**WEEK 11**

**11/5-11/9**

**EXAM 2 DUE**

**WEEK 12**

**11/12-11/16**

20. Art as Aesthetic Production: Monroe Beardsley

21. Art as Practice: Noel Carroll

**WEEK 13**

**11/19-11/23**

22. Art as Make-Believe: Kendall Walton

23. Art as Feminism: Carolyn Korsmeyer

**WEEK 14**

**11/26-11/30**

24. Art as a Cluster Concept: Berys Gaut

25. Art as the Arts: Dom Lopes

**WEEK 15**

**12/3-12/7**

**EXAM 3 DUE**