

**DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGES**

Texas A & M University - Commerce

Fall 2013

**PHILOSOPHY 362.01w: AESTHETICS**

**Section: 81517**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In this course we will examine and discuss some of the fundamental questions, ideas, and concepts central to aesthetics (the study of the nature, value, and function of judgments of taste in art, nature, and everyday objects and experiences) and questions in the philosophy of art (the study of the nature, value, and function of art, artworks, and the artworld. This includes all of the arts, visual arts, literary arts, performing arts, etc.).

**Questions in Aesthetics**

What standard (if any) can we appeal to when judging the beauty or ugliness of something?

Is beauty or ugliness (and everything in between) objective, subjective, or relative?

Can judgments of taste be justified, objective, or simply true? How?

Is there more widespread agreement or disagreement about matters of taste in art? Why?

Can we have meaningful agreement or disagreement about matters of taste? How?

What is or should be the role of knowledge in judgments of taste?

What is or should be the role of emotion in judgments of taste?

What is or should be the relation between form (appearance) and content (meaning) when judging artworks aesthetically?

**Questions in philosophy of art**

What is the definition of "art?"

What is the difference between artworks and ordinary objects or experiences?

What makes something a good or bad work of art?

Should we listen to art critics? Why?

What is or should be the role of art in society?

Should art be funded by public tax dollars? Why?

What is the difference between art and entertainment? How are the two related?  
 Why do we have real emotional reactions to fictional characters?  
 Is immoral art (for example, *The Triumph of the Will*, a nazi propaganda film) always bad art?  
 What can we learn from our experiences with artworks?  
 Should some art be censored? Why?

### **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. To acquire an overview of the field of aesthetics and philosophy of art.
2. To distinguish arguments and explanations from unsupported opinions.
3. To distinguish between descriptive statements (what is the case) and evaluative or normative statements (what ought to be the case).
4. To distinguish between giving reasons and expressing feelings, thoughts, or beliefs.
5. To learn to identify, understand, analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments on topics in aesthetics and philosophy of art.
6. To develop writing skills with emphasis on clarity, organization, concision, coherence, and consistency.
7. To learn how to respond to criticism, and how to deal with controversial subject matter, respectfully.
8. To practice the virtues of intellectual and academic integrity: accountability, perseverance, honesty, rigor, and fairness.

### **REQUIRED TEXT**

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.

### **GRADE DISTRIBUTION**

Final grades will be based on study question responses (40%, 2 points each), 3 exam essays (30%, 10 points each), and participation on online discussion board (30%, 1 point for each post). Late assignments will not be accepted. Grading scale: (90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D; below 60 = F).

### **STUDY QUESTION RESPONSES**

Each week (except during exam week) we will read two articles from the text. After carefully reading the assigned article, choose one "study question on the reading," copy the question into your assignment, and write a consistent, coherent, grammatically correct, and complete response to that question. Each study question response must be at least 5 sentences in length. Submit your study question responses (2 responses per week in one submission, about one page, single-spaced) to the appropriate basket in the dropbox in our course shell. Study question responses will be graded on their clarity and how well they demonstrate an understanding of the reading. Do not merely express your personal unconsidered or unsupported opinions, thoughts, feelings, or beliefs. Limit your use of first-person (for example, avoid expressions like "It is my opinion that," "I feel," "I believe," etc.). Explicitly refer to the readings and give reasons in defense of your answers as if you were making an argument. You must answer all parts of the question you select to earn credit. Study question responses are due no later than midnight on Sunday for that week

and must be submitted to the appropriate basket in the dropbox as a word document attachment. See the schedule of assignments for due dates. Each study question response will count 1 point toward the final grade (2 per weekly assignment). No late submissions will be accepted.

### **EXAM ESSAYS**

For each exam, you will select 2 essay questions from a list I will provide. Write a clear, coherent, grammatically correct, consistent, and complete response to each question you select. Do not merely express your personal unconsidered or unsupported opinions, thoughts, feelings, or beliefs. Limit your use of first-person (for example, avoid expression like "It is my opinion that," "I feel," "I believe," etc.). Explicitly refer to the readings and give reasons in defense of your answers as if you were making an argument. You must write at least 300 words for each question to earn ANY credit. Exam essays must be submitted as a word document attachment to the appropriate basket in the dropbox no later than midnight Sunday during exam week. Late submissions will not be accepted. Each essay question response will count for 10% of the final grade (10 points per exam). Your essay will be evaluated based on the grading criteria listed below (2 points per criterion).

1. In your first sentence, present a clear, direct answer to the question you select.
2. Give clear and consistent reasons in defense of your answer.
3. Give clear reasons in support of every claim you make.
4. Explicitly refer to the readings in your response and answer all parts of the question.
5. Clearly demonstrate a thorough understanding of the reading.

### **ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARD**

Each week in the "student lounge," I will post questions or comments on topics in the readings for that week for us to discuss (about two topics per week, one for each reading). Post at least one response, comment, or question on each topic under discussion for that week (two posts per week). To earn credit, each post must be a clear, coherent, and grammatically correct contribution that moves the discussion forward. Repeats of other posts or rephrases of other posts will not earn credit. Posts on that week's topic are due by midnight on Sunday for that week. Late posts will not earn credit.

**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.
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?
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. Here's why.

### **SYLLABUS CONTRACT**

Click on that tab in our eCollege course shell, print your name on the contract, scan and submit to the appropriately labeled basket in the dropbox by **Sunday of Week 1**.

### **EMAIL ETIQUETTE AND RESOURCES**

Email me your questions at any time. Just give me at least 24 hours to respond. Also, it is basic professional "netiquette" to always include a subject line, a greeting, and your name when sending emails. And please be as clear and specific as you can with your questions. I can't help you if I can't understand what you're asking.

I will post links to resources in doc sharing and webliography. For help with writing, The Writing Center in the Hall of Languages 103 is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, 9am-3pm; Tuesday 9am-2pm; Friday 9am-1pm. Also the Writing Center offers the Online Writing Lab, which can be accessed by sending an email to [writing.TAMUC@gmail.com](mailto:writing.TAMUC@gmail.com). I highly recommend using this resource, as it has proved invaluable to many students in prior courses.

### **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.

**What we're trying to do in this course:** This is not just a venue for us to express our individual opinions or preferences (for example, "I believe X, I like 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. 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 grade you earn.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### WEEK 1 (8/26-9/1)

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?" (in text and doc sharing).
- 2 student lounge posts.

**These first three assignments, 2 student lounge posts, and signed syllabus contract are due by Sunday, September 1 at midnight.** 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, coherent, and grammatically correct response that is at least 5 sentences in length. For the third assignment (the introduction to the Wartenberg text): Provide a clear, coherent, and grammatically correct summary, covering all of the major topics in the article (at least 200 words). Submit to appropriate dropbox basket as a word doc attachment. Post twice in student lounge, responding to week 1 discussion topics.

## **WEEK 2**

**(9/2-9/8)**

4. Art as Imitation: Plato

5. Art as Cognition: Aristotle.

2 student lounge posts.

**First text study question responses and student lounge posts due Sunday by midnight.**

## **WEEK 3**

**(9/9-9/15)**

6. Art as Object of Taste: David Hume

7. Art as Communicable Pleasure: Immanuel Kant

2 student lounge posts.

## **WEEK 4**

**(9/16-9/22)**

8. Art as Redemption: Friedrich Nietzsche

9. Art as Communication: Leo Tolstoy

2 student lounge posts.

## **WEEK 5**

**(9/23-9/29)**

10. Art as Symptom: Sigmund Freud

11. Art as Significant Form: Clive Bell

2 student lounge posts.

## **WEEK 6**

**(9/30-10/6)**

2 student lounge posts.

**EXAM 1 DUE**

## **WEEK 7**

**(10/7-10/13)**

12. Art as Expression: R. G. Collingwood

13. Art as Experience: John Dewey

2 student lounge posts.

## **WEEK 8**

**(10/14-10/20)**

- 14. Art as Indefinable: Morris Weitz
  - 15. Art as Exemplification: Suzanne Langer
- 2 student lounge posts.

**WEEK 9****(10/21-10/27)**

- 16. Art as Symbolic Form: Nelson Goodman
  - 17. Art as Industry: Theodor Adorno
- 2 student lounge posts.

**WEEK 10****(10/28-11/3)**

- 18. Art as Theory: Arthur Danto
  - 19. Art as Institution: George Dickie
- 2 student lounge posts.

**WEEK 11****(11/4-11/10)**

2 student lounge posts.

**EXAM 2 DUE****WEEK 12****(11/11-11/17)**

- 20. Art as Aesthetic Production: Monroe Beardsley
  - 21. Art as Practice: Noel Carroll
- 2 student lounge posts.

**WEEK 13****(11/18-11/24)**

- 22. Art as Make-Believe: Kendall Walton
  - 23. Art as Feminism: Carolyn Korsmeyer
- 2 student lounge posts.

**WEEK 14****(11/25-12/1)**

- 24. Art as a Cluster Concept: Berys Gaut
  - 25. Art as the Arts: Dom Lopes
- 2 student lounge posts.

**WEEK 15****(12/2-12/8)**

2 student lounge posts.

**EXAM 3 DUE**