

**Fall 2021—Hunter College
Philosophy/PHILO 258
Aesthetics**

Syllabus

About the Instructor

Instructor: Prof. Sandra Shapshay

Office: 1415 Hunter West

Office hours: 3-5pm Tuesdays (in person, walk-in); and by Zoom, Fridays 3-5pm
(except when prof is traveling—will keep folks posted)

Zoom Weekly Office Hours:

Topic: PHILO 258 Aesthetics Office Hours

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82570703923?pwd=aG41ajlZU2d5VkIPUE9WSmVMSIN1UT09>

Meeting ID: 825 7070 3923

Passcode: 814256

Contact information:

(812) 340-4631; sandra.shapshay@hunter.cuny.edu

About the Course

Class meeting days and times: **Section 1**, Tuesdays and Fridays 11:10am-12:25pm;
Section 2, Tuesdays and Fridays 12:45pm-2pm.

Class location: West Building 407

Required text:

- *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology 2nd edition*, edited by Stephen Cahn, Stephanie Ross, and Sandra Shapshay (Wiley Blackwell, 2020). ISBN: 978-1-118-94832-3

All other materials will be made available through the course Blackboard page

Recommended (but not required) text:

- *A Short Guide to Writing about Art* 11th edition, Sylvan Barnet (Pearson, 2015), ISBN-13: 978-0-205-88699-9 (paperback)

Contacting classmates:

1st day: Get the contact info for two classmates

(1)

(2)

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Course description: If you think “Game of Thrones” counts as great art and I think it’s terrible (and perhaps not even art) could either of us be right? *What is art anyway?* And is art valuable for the knowledge it affords, for pleasure, for the communication or expression of emotion, or for something else? Can good art be morally bad? And should we aesthetically appreciate nature in a manner differently from works of art?

Notwithstanding the contemporary GoT example, these are the kinds of questions that philosophers have been debating for more than two millennia, and this course aims to help students think through them rigorously and insightfully by engaging with selections from some of the greatest texts in this tradition: From Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to Danto’s “The Artworld”.

Interspersed with these classics of philosophical aesthetics, we will deploy this theoretical understanding in the context of several contemporary debates: Concerning the justifiability of ethical criticism; the relationships between art and politics; and the differences between appropriate nature and artistic appreciation. Throughout the course, students will be challenged to apply aesthetic theories to artistic examples, making use of the considerable resources available to us in NYC. **The course culminates in a final paper project in which students engage with a philosophical question in aesthetics/philosophy of art, and choose a work of art—or a part of the natural world or built environment—that serves as a good case study for that issue. In the final paper for the course (8-10 double-spaced pages), you will *do some philosophy* by immersing yourself a bit in the literature on a topic and taking a stand, arguing carefully and cogently for a thesis (with all sources documented properly in a complete bibliography).** Students will need to run their topic by me in writing by **Tuesday 11/9**, and are encouraged to have a brief conference with me about their plan during my office hours/Zoom office hours (or at another scheduled appointment time) by **Tuesday, 11/16**.

Course goals: By the end of this course, students will gain a deeper appreciation of some classic texts and on-going debates in field of philosophical aesthetics. Students will also engage critically, thoughtfully and carefully with a specific issue or question in aesthetics/philosophy of art in writing through a sustained research paper project, which utilizes at least one artistic/aesthetic example in the process.

Course Expectations and the Final Grade:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Percent of Final Grade</u>
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Reading Qs/short writing assignments/precis for final research paper	Various (see syllabus)	15%
In-class midterm exam	10/22	20%
In-class final exam	TBD	30%
Final research paper	12/22	35%

Grading scale

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A	93-96	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
F				below 60			

Grade Dissemination

I will post all grades in the gradebook on Blackboard

Course Policies

Course Policies: Grades

Late Work: Late written assignments will be accepted but marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for every calendar day late.

Grades of Incomplete: These will only be given in the case of documented medical or other emergency.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: As a student at Hunter College, you are expected to adhere to the standards and policies detailed in the CUNY policy on academic integrity: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/studentaffairs/student-conduct/academic-integrity/cuny-policy-on-academic-integrity>. When you submit an assignment with your name on it, you are signifying that the work contained therein is yours, unless otherwise cited or referenced. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged. All suspected violations of the policy will be reported to the Dean of Students and handled according to University policies. Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment, reduction in your final course grade, and a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities. If you are unsure about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or exam, be sure to seek clarification beforehand.

Re: Note Selling. Several commercial services have approached students regarding selling class notes/study guides to their classmates. Selling the instructor's notes in this course is not permitted. Violations of this policy will be

reported to the Dean of Students as academic misconduct (violation of course rules). Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment for which the notes are being sold, a reduction in your final course grade, [or](#) a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities.

Course Policies: Expectations for Students

- 1. I'm a bit old school and have a strict NO ELECTRONICS policy in this class.**
This means, that there shall be NO LAPTOP, PHONE, I-Watch or TABLET use during class meetings. If you need to keep your phone handy for an emergency, please keep the phone on vibrate and out of sight (i.e. not on your desk), and if you need to take an emergency call, please go out in the hallway to do so. Instead of taking notes on a laptop or tablet, I encourage you to **take notes on paper**, in a notebook, with pen or pencil. Research (Mueller & Oppenheimer *Psychological Science* 2014) shows that this is the best way to understand and retain the material, and this is also a way to ensure that you're fully engaged in this class. However, let me know if you have a disability accommodation that requires that you be able to utilize a laptop, etc., and I will make an exception.
- 2. Bring the actual, physical text/printed-out copy of the reading under discussion for the day to class with you.** We will often look closely at particular passages in the reading and you will be responsible for having a physical copy to look at in front of you.
- 3. Attendance:** Please attend class meetings as regularly as possible; this ensures that we have continuity in our discussions and is the key to success in this course.
- 4. Civility:** As a classroom community, we will have some potentially heated discussions in class. The aim is to promote a rigorous, free and bold exchange of ideas--this is what college is all about!--but discussions should always be kept civil by focusing disagreement on the ideas themselves and not going "*ad feminem/ad hominem*." Additionally, I want to hear everyone's voice in class discussions; if you have a question or a thought, please raise your hand and speak up. Western philosophy was born in dialogue and thrives when folks voice their questions, concerns, objections, confusion, etc. etc. Please keep in mind that the goal is for us all to have the most fruitful and enlightening philosophical discussions possible, even if it means we must agree to disagree at the end of the day.
- 5. Students with Disabilities:** In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 4 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of Access/ABILITY located in room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance, please call (212-772-4857)/TTY (212-650-3250).
- 6. Sexual Misconduct:** In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation

against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of *sexual violence* on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College. Such students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444). Students experiencing *all other forms of sexual misconduct* are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123. For more on the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, see: <http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct-12-1-14-with-links.pdf>

7. **Religious Observances:** If you need to miss a class for a religious observance, just let me know.
8. **Students called to active duty:** Please let me know if your active military service interferes with your class attendance and performance, and I can make an accommodation.

Support Services for Students

Writing Tutorial Services:

The philosophy department offers tutoring services; I'll have more information on this in the first few weeks of the semester.

Professor's Office Hours: Students are encouraged to drop in during my regular office hours, Tuesdays, 3-5pm, 1415 Hunter West, no appointment necessary. I'll also be holding regular Zoom office hours on Fridays from 3-5pm (see Zoom info above). If you cannot make these hours, however, please email me to set up an in-person or Zoom appointment.

Important Dates to Remember

Note: All assignment due dates and the course schedule are subject to change at the instructor's discretion; students will be given reasonable notice in class of any changes; in addition, changes will be posted as announcements in Blackboard.

Assignment or other important event	Due date
Midterm exam	Friday 10/22, in class
Field Trip	Friday, 10/29, meet at 10:45am MoMA (11 W. 53 rd St)
Précis for final research paper	11/9

Final Exam	TBD
Final papers due	Weds, 12/22

Class Schedule

Date	To Prepare for Class	In-Class Activities and Topics
F. 8/27	Have a look at the syllabus on Blackboard; make sure to obtain the required text listed above	Course and student introductions
T. 8/31	<p>What is art? (And what is it good for?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Art as imitation</i>—useless or, worse, morally corrupting (Plato) <p>Read selections from Plato's <i>Republic</i> pp. 39-48. Write brief answers to reading questions (see Blackboard for document containing reading questions) and turn them in at the end of class.</p>	Discuss reading questions on Plato
F. 9/3 & T. 9/7	NO CLASSES at Hunter (Labor Day & Rosh Hashanah)	
F. 9/10	<p><i>Art as imitation</i>—good for knowledge, ethics, catharsis, etc. (Aristotle)</p> <p>Read: Aristotle's <i>Poetics</i> pp. 57-72.</p> <p>In no more than one page (single-spaced, typed), (1) summarize clearly what you take to be Aristotle's main defense of art vs. Plato (offer at least 2 citations from Aristotle's text in doing so to support the textual accuracy of your summary), and (2) briefly evaluate whether you think his defense is successful. [Please turn in this assignment at the end of class; 20 points]</p>	Aristotle vs. Plato discussion and evaluation
T. 9/14	<p><i>Contemporary Update on Plato and Aristotle. Question: How morally bad can good art be; Is a moral flaw in a work of art thereby an artistic flaw?</i></p> <p>Read: Berys Gaut "The Ethical Criticism of Art" (1998). (Available on Blackboard).</p>	
F.	Autonomism and Ethicism	

9/17	Read: Eileen John, "Artistic Value and Opportunistic Moralism" pp. 653-661	
T. 9/21	Question: What is aesthetic experience? What is aesthetic judgment? Immanuel Kant, Part I. Read: pp. 155-171 (up to but not including the "Analytic of the Sublime")	
F. 9/24	Prof. out of town at conference—no class today; Please watch video lecture, Kant Part II. On Blackboard, Read: Kant pp. 171-190.	
T. 9/28	Kant on the beautiful, the sublime and art. Read: Sandra Shapshay "Kantian approaches to the ethical evaluation of art" (Blackboard)	
F. 10/1	Contemporary approaches to aesthetic experience: Read: Alan Goldman "What is Aesthetic Experience?" pp. 581-588 & Jerrold Levinson "Toward an Adequate Conception of Aesthetic Experience" (Blackboard)	In-class reading quiz today (10 points)
T. 10/5	Back to art: Art as communication/expression of emotion Read: Leo Tolstoy "What is Art?" pp. 299-311	
F. 10/8	Read: R.G. Collingwood "The Principles of Art" pp. 341-356	
T. 10/12	Read: Jenefer Robinson "Music and the Emotions" pp. 673-689.	
F. 10/15	Contextual views of art Arthur Danto, "The Artworld" pp. 439-447	
T. 10/19	REVIEW SESSION for midterm exam	Jot down all of your questions on the review sheet—we'll discuss
F. 10/22	In-class Midterm Exam	
T. 10/26	Read: Arthur Danto, Ch. 11 from <i>After the End of Art</i> (Blackboard)	
F. 10/29	Museum of Modern Art field trip! Meet outside entrance of the MoMA, 11 W. 53rd St, at 10:45am.	Aesthetics scavenger hunt;

		lunch debriefing/discussion
T. 11/2	Should we give up on trying to define art? Read: Berys Gaut "Art as a Cluster Concept" pp. 461-473	Turn in typed responses to scavenger hunt (50 points)
F. 11/5	Professor out of town at a conference—no class meeting. Please use the time to work on your final project precis.	spend some good time thinking through and researching your final research paper.
T. 11/9	Final research paper précis (50 points) due in class Everyday aesthetics: Read: Carolyn Korsmeyer "Aesthetic Value, Art and Food" pp. 783-789 & Yuriko Saito "Everyday Aesthetics" pp. 777-782.	
F. 11/12	How should we aesthetically appreciate the natural environment? Differently from art? Allen Carlson "Appreciation and the Natural Environment" pp. 767-775	
T. 11/16	Noel Carroll "On Being Emotionally Moved by Nature" (Blackboard)	
F. 11/19	Professor away at conference (last one!)—No class meeting. Please watch online lecture on environmental aesthetics (Blackboard) Read: Jennifer Welchman "Aesthetics of Nature, Constitutive Goods, and Environmental Conservation: A Defense of Moderate Formalist Aesthetics" (Blackboard)	
T. 11/23	Final research paper writing workshop: Some pro tips for writing good philosophy term papers. Be sure to bring a brief sketch of your project with you that you can share (orally) with the class.	Everyone should arrive prepared to give a 2 minute elevator pitch (orally) of your intended project and thesis, and we'll offer feedback as a class.

F. 11/26	Thanksgiving break—no classes meet	
T. 11/30	Art and politics: Read: W.E.B. Du Bois “Criteria of Negro Art” & Alain Locke “Art or Propaganda?”	
F. 12/3	Mary Devereaux, “Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers, and the Gendered Spectator: the ‘New’ Aesthetics” pp. 737-749	
T. 12/7	Evolutionary approaches: Stephen Davies “Art and Aesthetic Behaviors as Possible Expressions of our Biologically Evolved Human Nature” pp. 791-796	
F. 12/10	Review session for final exam	
12/15	Final Exam date and time TBA	
-12/2		
1	Final papers due electronically (on Blackboard) by midnight Wednesday, December 22 nd .	