

PHILOSOPHY 240

Philosophy of Art

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The Instructor:

I was born in East Vancouver and raised in Burnaby. Even as a student at Burnaby North High School, I was interested in philosophy. (This is unusual; most students come to philosophy after initially intending to study something else.) After receiving my B.A. at Simon Fraser, I completed an M.A. at the University of Waterloo in Ontario and a Ph.D. at Boston University. I taught for a year at the University of Calgary before coming to the University of Victoria. I was also a research fellow for a year at Melbourne University in Australia and I have been a visiting scholar at the Universidad de Murcia (Spain) and Durham University (UK). I am currently Professor of Philosophy at the University of Victoria. I was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 2015.

I have a long-standing interest in philosophy of art, and I have written three books: on the subject: *Art and Knowledge* (2001), *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (2008) and *Critique of Pure Music* (2014). I also edited the four volume collection, *Aesthetics: The Critical Concepts in Philosophy* (2005). I have produced a translation, with introduction and notes, of Charles Batteux's *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle* (2015). I have edited *Semantics of Aesthetic Judgements* (2017).

My interest in philosophy of art is, in part, an outgrowth of my interest in the arts. I am particularly interested in music and literature. I am Artistic Director of the Early Music Society of the Islands and I am an amateur harpsichordist (a very bad one). If I had to go to a desert island with the recordings of one composer, I would choose Handel. If, on my desert island, I could have the works of only one novelist, I would choose Jane Austen's works.

Outline

This course is designed to introduce students to the main questions in philosophy of art. We will read a series of classical and contemporary writers. We will focus on defining

the concept of art, determining what a work of art is, and answering fundamental questions about the interpretation and evaluation of works of art.

Text:

Steven M. Cahn and Aaron Meskin (eds.), *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology*.

Additional readings will be distributed.

Grading:

Students will write two essays of approximately 1500 words, a series of eight surprise quizzes and a short exercise in experiential learning. The best five grades on the quizzes will be used in the calculation of your final grade. The quizzes, together, will be worth 10% of the course grade. Each of the two essays will be worth 40%. The exercise in experiential learning will be worth 10%

Four criteria will be used in assessing essays: (1) effective and correct use of the English language; (2) accurate presentation of the views of the philosophers discussed; (3) presentation of valid arguments; and (4) evidence of original thought. A first class essay will be characterised by clear, grammatical prose and careful exegesis. It will display an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments being discussed. It will state a thesis and present reasoned arguments for it. A first class essay will also contain evidence of your own efforts grapple with philosophical issues and to arrive at your own solutions. Students are not expected to make startling philosophical discoveries, but they are expected to engage the issues. Students are strongly discouraged from making extensive use of secondary sources. You should not need to read anything except the assigned readings. Students' own reasoned reflections are more important than a survey of the extant literature.

After the deadlines, essays will be accepted without penalty for seven days. If papers are submitted after the deadline, the instructor is not under an obligation to provide written comments on them. No papers will be accepted more than seven days after the deadline. Exceptions will be made only in cases of **properly documented** illness or personal crisis. Requests for exceptions must be received in writing and **no more than seven days after the deadline**. If you miss a quiz for good reason, see me about writing a makeup quiz.

The exercise in experiential learning will involve attending a live arts event in the course of the term. The arts event can be a concert, a play, an opera, a poetry reading, a gallery showing, an artistic installation, or a similar event. It may not, however, be an event in a club where alcohol is served. This exercise should be no more than two pages (or about 500 words) long. Students will engage with the art presented, using some of the concepts or theories acquired in PHIL 240.

Students will receive a final grade out of 100 points. Numbers will be converted to a letter grade in accordance with the following scale: 90-100=A+; 85-89=A; 80-84=A-; 77-79=B+; 73-76=B; 70-72=B-; 65-69=C+; 60-64=C; 50-59= D; 0-49=F. Final grades will be rounded to the nearest whole number.

N grades

Students who have completed the following elements will be considered to have completed the course and will be assigned a final grade:

- *Essay 1*
- *Essay 2*
- At least four of the eight surprise quizzes
- Experiential learning exercise

Failure to complete one or more of these elements will result in a grade of “N” regardless of the cumulative percentage on other elements of the course. An N is a failing grade, and it factors into a student’s GPA as O. The maximum percentage that can accompany an N on a student’s transcript is 49

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will not be tolerated. Please see the University Calendar for a description of plagiarism. The minimum penalty is a failing grade on the assignment produced by plagiarism. Serious or repeated plagiarism can result in failure of a course and even expulsion from the University.

Schedule of Lectures

Week One 6 and 9 January

Topic: What is Philosophy of Art?
Readings: Kristeller, ‘Introduction’; Plato, *Ion*

Week Two 13 and 16 January

Topic: Ancient Greek views on Art; Definitions of Art
Readings: Plato, *Republic*; Aristotle, *Poetics*

Week Three: 20 and 23 January

Topic: Definitions of Art
Readings: Tolstoy, *What is Art?*; Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*; Bell, *Art*;
Collingwood, *Principles of Art*

Week Four: 27 and 30 January

Topic: Definitions of art, continued

Readings: Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics"; Danto, "The Artworld"; Dickie, "What is Art?"

Week Five: 3 and 6 February

Topic: Ontology of Art

Readings: Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*; Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is"

Week Six: 10 and 13 February

Topic: Aesthetic Value

Readings: Hutcheson, *An Inquiry*; Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry*, Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*

*** Reading Break ***

Week Seven: 24 and 27 February

Topic: Evaluation of Art

Readings: Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"

Assignment: First essay due 24 February

Week Eight: 2 and 5 March

Topic: Interpretation

Readings: Wimsatt and Beardsley, "Intentional Fallacy"; Nehamas, "The Postulated Author"; Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation"

Week Nine: 9 and 12 March

Topic: Art and morality

Readings: Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art"; Devereaux, "Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers, and the Gendered Spectator"

Week Ten: 16 and 19 March

Topic: Fiction and Literature

Readings: Young, "Making It Up"; Stecker, "What is literature?" (These readings will be distributed.)

Week Eleven: 23 and 26 March

Topic: Philosophy of music

Readings: Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*; Langer, *Feeling and Form*; Kivy, "Emotions in the Music"

Week Thirteen: 30 March and 2 April

Topic: The Paradox of Tragedy

Readings: Walton, "Fearing Fictions"; Hume, "Of Tragedy"; Feagin, "The Pleasures of Tragedy"; Radford, "How Can We be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?"

Information on how to find the Feagin and Radford articles will be distributed.

Hume: <https://davidhume.org/texts/fd/>

Assignment: Second essay and experiential learning exercise due 3 April.

N.B.: This syllabus is tentative, and intended only to give students a rough guide to readings, dates and topics. Dates may be changed.