

AH113: Introduction to Aesthetics

Instructor: Dr. Thomas Hilgers
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Course Time: Thu 15:45-19:00
Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits
Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

According to its most general conception, aesthetics is a discipline that investigates the nature of *sensory experience* and *cognition*. According to a more narrow conception, it investigates the nature of *aesthetic experience* and *judgment*. Finally, aesthetics is often conceived of as an enquiry concerning the nature and value of *art*, or rather of the *fine arts*. In this course, students will become familiar with aesthetics according to all three of these conceptions. That is, we will discuss questions such as: **1)** what is sensibility? **2)** What is beauty? **3)** What is an aesthetic experience? **4)** Do we need to have aesthetic experiences in order to live a good life? **5)** Do we need to have them in order to criticize society and initiate political change? **6)** What is an artwork? **7)** Are our judgments about art always subjective? **8)** Is taste a tool for social distinction and possibly oppression? **9)** Can (or must) art be politically relevant? **10)** What could it mean to call a work “modern,” “postmodern,” or “contemporary”? In order to find answers to these questions, we will discuss texts by philosophers, sociologists, and critics, such as Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Adorno, Greenberg, Dickie, Foucault, Bourdieu, Lyotard, Butler, Shusterman, Nehamas, and Korsmeyer.

Classroom Presentations and Term Papers

In this seminar, students will learn how to give a classroom presentation on a philosophical text, and they will learn how to write a term paper on a philosophical topic. We will talk in great detail about how to do research for such a paper, how to compose it, and how to write it in an academically acceptable manner. Moreover, before actually writing her paper, each student must write a paragraph that explains her project. The instructor will then provide her with some feedback on her paragraph and with some advice on how to approach her topic.

Attendance, Academic Integrity, and Requirements

Attendance at all classes is expected. Unexcused absence from more than two sessions of 90 minutes in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. For regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence, students should consult the Student Handbook for regulations. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity (for example cases of plagiarism) will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Each student must give one classroom presentation and write two papers.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2021: Some students might need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors

should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

Grade Breakdown

The grade breakdown for this seminar will be as follows:

Final Paper (3500 words): 50 %

Midterm Paper (1500 words): 25 %

Participation (including one Classroom Presentation): 25 %

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Papers that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Papers that are turned in even later will still be accepted within four weeks of the deadline, but they will not receive a grade higher than C.

Schedule and Deadlines

	Beauty
02/04/21	Introduction Plato, <i>Symposium</i> , pp. 1-30.
02/11/21	Plato, <i>Symposium</i> , pp. 31-54. Alexander Nehamas, <i>Only a Promise of Happiness</i> , pp. 102-113 and 130-138.
	Taste
02/18/21	David Hume, "Of the Standards of Taste." Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> , § 1-5.
02/25/21	Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> , § 6-14. Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> , § 15-22.
03/04/21	Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics</i> , pp. 1-8. Pierre Bourdieu, <i>Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste</i> , Intro + 1-36. Paragraphs for Midterm Papers Due
	Art
03/11/21	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book X. Aristotle, <i>Poetics</i> .
03/18/21	Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> , § 43-49. Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> , pp. 13-35. Midterm Papers Due

03/25/21	Martin Heidegger, "On the Origin of the Work of Art," pp. 1-19. Martin Heidegger, "On the Origin of the Work of Art," pp. 19-33.
04/01/21	Spring Break
04/08/21	John Dewey, <i>Art as Experience</i> , Chapter 1. John Dewey, <i>Art as Experience</i> , Chapter 14.
04/15/20	Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry", pp. 94-125.
04/22/20	Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt"
04/29/20	Arthur Danto, "The Artworld" George Dickie, "What is Art? An Institutional Analysis." Paragraphs for Final Papers Due
05/06/20	Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal." Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Feminist Aesthetics."
05/13/20	Federal Holiday
05/20/20	Final Papers Due

Literature

Most readings for this seminar will be combined as a reader, which can be purchased at the library. Moreover, a copy of Plato's *Symposium* can be borrowed at the library.

Throughout the seminar, the instructor will suggest further readings and helpful secondary literature. A few useful and informative books to start with are the following:

1. Gaut, Berys, *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*.
2. Guyer, Paul, *A History of Aesthetics*, three volumes.
3. Kelly, Michael, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, several volumes.
4. Kivy, Peter, *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*.
5. Levinson, Jerrold, *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is an online encyclopedia that generally offers many excellent articles on topics and philosophers that will be discussed in this seminar.

Computers (including all forms of tablets and smartphones) are not allowed during classes.