

PHI 220/02
Prof. Vessey
MAK B-3-201
331-3158

Aesthetics

TTh 10:00-11:15
MAK BL-110
Office hours: 3:45-5:00TTh
2:00-3:00 F, and by Appt

Required Materials:

Cahn and Meskin, *Aesthetics* (Blackwell)

A number of handouts that will be posted on Blackboard.

Course Content:

Questions in the philosophy of art are some of the most provocative in all philosophy. We will be reading classic works from the history of philosophy asking questions about interpreting the meaning of artworks, the nature of beauty, the possibility of objective judgment of works of art, the relations between art and reality, between creativity and reason, between art and life, and whether just any object could become a work of art. Because this version of the class fulfills the SWS requirement, we will focus particularly on the literary arts and the nature of writing—the history of the development of writing; the cognitive development associated with the shift from an oral to a literate culture; the neurophysiology of writing; the artistic status of poetry; whether writing is gendered; and the question of graffiti as art.

Course Method:

The course will be a combination of lecture and discussion. Every Tuesday we will be discussing a classic work in the philosophy of art; every Thursday we will be focused on writing. Since discussion is not reproducible and there are a number of in class writing activities, attendance and participation is a crucial part of the class. The daily attendance/participation grade is: F-not in class; D-in class unprepared; C-in class, prepared, not participating in discussion; B-in class, prepared, participating in discussion; A-in class, prepared, significantly contributing to the discussion. Over four absences will result in the student's final grade being cut in half, so the highest possible final grade would be a C.

There will be a number of in class writing activities—some handed in, some not, as well as short writing assignments outside class. The writing and editing activities will cumulate in two five page papers, one on the general topic of how to interpret and evaluate art, one on the topic of what counts as a work of art. One of these two will be significantly rewritten as a final paper due at the time of the final exam. A minimal requirement for university level papers is that they are typed, double-spaced, 12 pt Times or Times/New Roman font, with 1 inch margins. They should also be proofread carefully for typos. A typo policy applies to all papers: the grade on the papers will be lowered one grade (for example, from an A- to a B+) for every four typos. Typos include grammatical errors, spelling errors, improper use of gendered pronouns, and failure to properly cite a quotation. Failure to cite differs from plagiarism. Plagiarism is a sign that the student has lost his or her sense for the point of going to college. The student will, at least, get a zero for the assignment and the violation will be reported to the Dean of Students Office. The expectation is that the student will drop the class. There will be a final exam over the views of the philosophers read.

This course is designated SWS. Completion of WRT 150 with a grade of C or better (not C-) is a prerequisite for receiving SWS credit in this class. Because they distract from the discussion, computers are not allowed in the classroom.

If you have any disabilities that require special accommodation you should speak with Prof. Vessey as soon as possible at the beginning of the term.

Grade Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation: 30%

Short Papers: 40%

Final Paper: 20%

Final Exam: 10%

Course Schedule

1. Jan. 11 Introductions
2. Jan. 13 Plato—Interpreters and performers
Reading: Plato's *The Ion* in Cahn/Meskin, 16-23.
3. Jan 18 Plato – Art and society
Reading: from Plato's *The Republic* in Cahn/Meskin, 24-33.
4. Jan 20 Language, style, and politics
Reading: George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"
5. Jan 25 Plotinus—The metaphysics of beauty
Reading: Plotinus' "Ennead I vi, On Beauty" in Cahn/Meskin, 57-63.
6. Jan 27 Responsibility of writers?
Reading: Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Morality of the Profession of Letters"
7. Feb 1 Hume— A distinctive aesthetic sense?
Reading: "Of the Standard of Taste" in Cahn/Meskin, 103-112.
8. Feb 3 Writing philosophically
Reading: "Harvard Guide to Philosophical Writing"
and Piper's "Ten Common Mistakes"
9. Feb 8 G.H. Lessing—How does poetry relate to the other arts?
Reading: from Lessing's *Laocoön* in Cahn/Meskin, 123-130
10. Feb 10 How to write poetry
Reading: Stafford, "A Way of Writing"; from Hugo's *Triggering Town*
11. Feb 15 Kant—The nature of aesthetic judgment
Reading: from Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in Cahn/Meskin, 131-144.
12. Feb 17 The neurophysiology of writing
Reading: from Flaherty's *Midnight Disease*
13. Feb 22 Kant—The artistic genius
Reading: from Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in Cahn/Meskin, 144-156.
14. Feb 24 The importance of originality in art
Reading: Letham, "Ecstasy of Influence"

15. March 1 Hegel—Does art progress?
Reading: from Hegel's *Lectures on Art* in Cahn/Meskin, 180-192.

16. March 3 The cognitive consequences of literacy
Reading: Goody, "Consequences of Literacy"

SPRING BREAK

17. March 15 Tolstoy—Art as emotional communication
Reading: Tolstoy's "What is Art?" in Cahn/Meskin, 233-242.

18. March 17 The evolutionary roots of language and art.
Reading: Deacon, "The Aesthetic Faculty"

19. March 22 Bell—Does the content matter for art?
Reading: Bell's "Art" in Cahn/Meskin, 261-269.

20. March 24 Beardsley—Do the author's intentions matter for interpretation?
Reading: Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy"
in Cahn/Meskin, 547-555.

21. March 29 Dewey—Art as a form of Experience
Reading: from Dewey's *Art as Experience* in Cahn/Meskin, 296-316.

22. March 31 No Class/Listening Assignment

23. April 5 Gadamer—Poetic language
Reading: Gadamer's "On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth"

24. April 7 Woman's writing?
Reading: Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

25. April 12 Danto—Can anything be a work of art?
Reading: Danto's "The Artworld" in Cahn/Meskin, 417-425.

26. April 14 Language use in the visual arts
Reading: *Artlink* Editorial, "The Word as Art"

27. April 19 Is graffiti art?
Reading: Mailer's "The Faith of Graffiti"

28. April 21 Evaluations/Review for Final

Wed. April 27th 8:00am FINAL EXAM/Final Revision due