

PHIL 11: INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART & AESTHETICS

Foothill College Course Outline of Record

Heading	Value
Effective Term:	Summer 2025
Units:	4
Hours:	4 lecture per week (48 total per quarter)
Degree & Credit Status:	Degree-Applicable Credit Course
Foothill GE:	Area 3: Arts & Humanities
Transferable:	CSU/UC
Grade Type:	Letter Grade (Request for Pass/No Pass)
Repeatability:	Not Repeatable

Student Learning Outcomes

- To identify major aesthetic theories, defined both in terms of individual thinkers (Plato, Aristotle) and schools of thought (Marxism, structuralism, etc.)
- To be able to use aesthetic theories to critically analyze works of art.

Description

Analysis of the nature of art and aesthetics as an aspect of philosophic discourse. Engagement with historical and contemporary philosophic literature regarding central topics of aesthetic concern. Topics include the possibility of defining and delineating art from other related fields of endeavor (craft, mass entertainment, video games, etc.); examination of the reasons and qualities that make some sensory experiences specifically artistic; the possibility, or otherwise, for defining objective standards of beauty and taste; the potential for deriving meaning, value and knowledge regarding the human condition from artistic endeavor. Topics illustrated through examples from classical through contemporary visual art, architecture, music, and film.

Course Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Analyze aesthetic theories and the underlying logic used to establish concepts regarding art and aesthetics.
- Develop an historical understanding of the development of theories regarding art and aesthetics and how such development can be understood to reflect changes in the overall development of human consciousness.
- Form critical aesthetic judgments in response to a variety of sensory experiences.
- Evaluate and discuss the potential for art to express philosophic ideas. In particular, issues of human nature and potential for transformation, expansion and dissemination of knowledge, political and ethical concerns.

Course Content

- Introduction
 - Possibility for clear definitions of terms: Art, beauty, sublime, etc.
 - Problems of demarcation of art from other forms of creative expression (craft, industrial design, religious ritual, commercial entertainment, etc.)
 - Evaluation of different strategies for definition
 - Functionalist definitions
 - Mimetic theory
 - Expression theory
 - Cognitive theory
 - Aesthetic theory
 - Institutional definition
 - Historical definitions
 - Cluster definitions
- Classical views
 - Plato
 - Mimesis: Art as imitation
 - Art as reflective of the Utopian ideal
 - Aristotle
 - The essential nature of art as representative of human nature and experience
 - Aristotelian formalism
 - Tragedy and catharsis
- Modern aesthetics
 - Edmund Burke
 - The nature of the sublime in contrast to the beautiful
 - David Hume
 - Standard of Taste
 - Immanuel Kant
 - Response to Hume
 - Aesthetic judgement and the "free-play of intellectual faculties"
 - Kantian notion of the sublime
- 19th century developments
 - Hegel
 - Art as an expression of the Weltgeist (world-spirit)
 - The relationship of art to philosophy and religion
 - Art as expression of the state and cultural identity
 - Art as reflection of the Zeitgeist (time-spirit)
 - Schopenhauer
 - Art as revealing of the universal will
 - Aesthetic experience as temporary release from the human condition
 - Nietzsche
 - Art as the balance of rational and passionate (Apollonian and Dionysian) aspects of human creativity and experience
 - Art as expression of potentiality for transformative change
 - Leo Tolstoy
 - Art as communication of feeling
- 20th century through contemporary thought (thinkers for this section to include a selection from the following; additional thinkers may be included in this section pending departmental approval)
 - Martin Heidegger
 - The work of art as disclosure of being

- b. Walter Benjamin
 - i. The "aura" of the work of art in the face of capitalism and technological innovation
- c. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno
 - i. Art versus the "culture industry"
- d. Clive Bell
 - i. Art as significant form
- e. Arthur Danto
 - i. Art as product of "The Artworld"
- f. George Dickie
 - i. Institutional theory of art
- g. Roland Barthes
 - i. Art and the concept of text
- h. Jean-François Lyotard
 - i. Postmodernism and the sublime
- i. Carolyn Korsmeyer
 - i. Contemporary feminist aesthetics
- j. Slavoj Žižek
 - i. Post-Marxist psychoanalytic interpretation of cinema
- k. Kwame Anthony Appiah
 - i. African art in a postcolonial context
- l. Julia Kristeva
 - i. Art and abjection

Cahn, Steve, Stephanie Ross, and Sandra Shapshay. Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology. 2020.

Townsend, Dabney. Aesthetics: Classic Readings from the Western Tradition. 2001.

The representative texts are commonly used anthologies in the field of aesthetic theory and are the most current publications containing suitable translations of the requisite course material. They contain primary sources covering a large portion of the course material. More recent material will be provided in a supplemental reader.

Types and/or Examples of Required Reading, Writing, and Outside of Class Assignments

1. Readings from primary texts
2. Review of handouts and relevant reading material
3. Examination of various artistic forms of expression informed by relevant aesthetic theory

Discipline(s)

Philosophy

Lab Content

Not applicable.

Special Facilities and/or Equipment

When taught as an online distance learning section, students and faculty need ongoing and continuous internet and email access.

Method(s) of Evaluation

Methods of Evaluation may include but are not limited to the following:

Quizzes
 Essays
 Written examinations
 Student presentations applying theory to evaluation of artwork

Method(s) of Instruction

Methods of Instruction may include but are not limited to the following:

Lecture and discussion
 Group work and collaborative learning exercises

Representative Text(s) and Other Materials

Ross, Stephen David. Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory, 3rd ed.. 1994.

Wartenberg, Thomas E.. The Nature of Art, 2nd ed.. 2007.

Cazeaux, Clive. The Continental Aesthetics Reader, 2nd ed.. 2011.