

Philosophy 543: *Topics in Philosophy of Art*

Ned Markosian
Department of Philosophy
University of Massachusetts – Amherst
markosian@umass.edu
Spring 2020

Office: South College E421

Office Hours: TuTh 2:30-3:30

Overview

This course will examine a number of philosophical questions about art, including the following.

- What is art? How should we distinguish between works of art and things that are not works of art?
- What is art for? Why does it play such an outsized role in our cultures, our thinking, and our lives?
- At first glance, it appears that some works of art (paintings, for example, and sculptures) are concrete physical objects, while other works of art (novels and musical compositions, for example) are abstract types of some kind (a series of sentence types, in the case of a novel, and a type of sound sequence, in the case of a musical composition). Is this initial impression accurate? Are works of art in the different genres instances of radically different ontological categories? And if so, does it follow that some works of art are created while others are discovered?
- Speaking of ontology, what exactly are movies?
- Works of fiction often cause deep emotional responses, even among people who know that the stories and characters contained in them are fictional. How is that possible?
- Similarly, musical works, including works that contain no lyrics or narrative themes, often cause deep emotional responses, despite being, on their surfaces anyway, not really about anything. How is that possible?
- Is aesthetic value a real thing? Are some things intrinsically beautiful, in a way that is independent of being observed? What about artistic value? Is that a real thing, and if so, does it differ from aesthetic value?
- What are fictions, and how (if at all) do they differ from novels and short stories?
- What about fictional characters? What exactly are they? Are they created by their authors, or are they discovered?

Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Characterize some of the main issues in The Philosophy of Art.
- Articulate and defend their own views on these main issues in The Philosophy of Art.

- Prepare a high-quality handout for a presentation, and give a professional, conference-style presentation.
- Write a proper academic term paper.
- Finally have answers to a number of questions about art that have bugged them for years. (And probably also become aware of some new questions that did not previously bug them...)

Course Requirements

- ❖ **Three presentations** (collectively worth 30% of final grade)
- ❖ **Seven reaction papers** (collectively worth 30% of final grade)
- ❖ **One term paper** (worth 40% of final grade)

Required Readings

- Abell, Catharine, "Art: What it Is and Why it Matters," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **85** (2011), pp. 671-691.
- Dodd, Julian, "Musical Works as Eternal Types," *British Journal of Aesthetics* **40** (2000), pp. 424-440.
- Eaton, Marcia Muelder, "Art and the Aesthetic," in Peter Kivy (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (Blackwell, 2004).
- Gaut, Berys, "The Philosophy of the Movies: Cinematic Narration," in Peter Kivy (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (Blackwell, 2004).
- Robinson, Jenefer, "The Emotions in Art," in Peter Kivy (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (Blackwell, 2004).
- Saito, Yuriko, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Thomasson, Amie, *Fiction and Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

About Presentations

Presentations should be about 10 minutes long, and each one should feature a 1-page handout. You are not expected to summarize the reading. Instead, you should select one main point or argument from the reading (ideally this will be one of the two or three most important things in the reading), and present your own response to that point or argument. (You will have to coordinate with whoever else is presenting on the same day to avoid overlap with respect to the content of your presentations.)

Our schedule for presentations will be worked out on the first day of class.

About Reaction Papers

For each day when you are not doing a presentation, you will be required to turn in a reaction paper on that day's reading assignment. A reaction paper is a 2- or 3-page paper in which you (i) summarize the main content of the reading assignment, (ii) raise some substantive questions

about that content, and (iii) articulate your own solution to the main philosophical problem addressed in the reading.

Your lowest reaction paper grade will be dropped, and the remaining seven grades will be averaged to determine your overall reaction paper grade.

Reaction papers are due at noon on the day of a given reading assignment, and must be submitted using Turnitin on Moodle. Late papers will be penalized 10 points (out of 100).

About Term Papers

Your term paper must be on an approved topic, and should be approximately 8-12 pages long. It must be submitted using Turnitin on Moodle. Late papers will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per day, but extensions are available to those who email me ahead of time.

A Word About Discussions

Philosophical discussions (whether in class, after a talk, or in informal settings) can vary along a number of different dimensions. One of these is a spectrum that ranges from (a) a competitive, zero-sum game that involves scoring points and trying to appear smart, on one end, to (b) a cooperative and fun activity aimed at discovering and solving interesting philosophical problems, on the other end. In general, the closer a discussion is to the cooperative end of this spectrum, the better it will be – better because it produces better philosophy, and better also because it is more enjoyable for everyone involved.

Here are some rules designed to keep us on the right end of this spectrum.

1. Don't be mean.
2. Never interrupt. If you have a great point, it will still be a great point when it is your turn to speak.
3. Don't bogart the discussion. Some people are more shy than you. Many of them have excellent things to say. It pays to listen.
4. Think in terms of abstract ideas that, once expressed, are on their own, rather than ideas that belong to a particular person.
5. Think of your job as trying to develop those ideas, making them clearer, stronger, better.
6. Try to build on points that have been made by others, whenever possible.
7. Try to make connections between the point currently under consideration and previous points.
8. Every once in a while during the discussion, someone should offer a big-picture comment (even if it is just a question). "So it seems to me that we were discussing X and Y. Did we ever come to any conclusion about whether Y is consistent with X?"
9. If you notice someone breaking one of the first two rules, speak up right away, even if – *especially if* – you are not the victim.

Classroom Rules and Policies

Laptops and similar devices are permitted in class, but only for (a) taking notes or (b) viewing the readings. *If you plan to use a laptop or similar device in class, please talk to me beforehand so that you can take The Pledge* (which involves solemnly swearing to use your device only for good and never for evil).

The use of cell phones, music players, headphones, ear buds, etc. is not permitted during class.

Schedule

Date	Reading Assignment	Presenters
Jan 22		
29	Abell, "Art: What it Is and Why it Matters"	
Feb 5	Dodd, "Musical Works as Eternal Types"	
12	Eaton, "Art and the Aesthetic"	
19	Robinson, "The Emotions in Art"	
26	Gaut, "The Philosophy of the Movies: Cinematic Narration"	
Mar 4	Saito, <i>Everyday Aesthetics</i> , Introduction and Chapter I	
11	Saito, <i>Everyday Aesthetics</i> , Chapter II	
18	Spring Break	
25	Thomasson, <i>Fiction and Metaphysics</i> , Introduction, Foreword to Part One, Chapters 1-2	
Apr 1	Thomasson, <i>Fiction and Metaphysics</i> , Chapters 3-5	
8	No class	
15	Thomasson, <i>Fiction and Metaphysics</i> , Foreword to Part Two, Chapters 6-7	
22	No class (Monday schedule)	
29	Thomasson, <i>Fiction and Metaphysics</i> , Chapters 8-10	
May 6	Term papers due at 5PM	