

PHI 1800H Philosophy of Art (Aesthetics) Spring 2024 Dr. Johnson and Dr. Soloveichik
3 credits

Contact Information:

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Course Description:

Utilizing both classical and modern philosophical texts, as well as works of theology and biblical exegesis, this course will address the nature of beauty, the possible moral dangers inherent in art, the nature and meaning of music, the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, the nature and meaning of literature and drama, the way in which a work of art can embody a philosophical thesis, and more. The class will also examine the work of modern Jewish thinkers that engaged in deep study of philosophical texts and then, in their own work, contrasted the Hebraic approach to art and the image with that of several different philosophical schools.

Learning Objectives:

Students will become familiar with, and will become able to assess critically, various claims and arguments which have been made about art, literature, and music. The following Goals and Student Learning Objectives of the Philosophy Department are addressed in this course, both for majors and for non-majors:

1. Philosophy majors will be able to analyze and evaluate arguments.

Student Learning Objective (1b): Students will be able to extract arguments from English prose.

2. Philosophy majors will be well acquainted with philosophical issues pertinent to the field.

Student Learning Objective (2a): Students will be able to communicate a selection of fundamentally important philosophical arguments, claims, problems, and paradoxes.

3. Philosophy majors will be able to construct their own philosophical arguments.

Student Learning Objective (3a): Students will be able to exhibit original and valid arguments for philosophical claims, and to respond in an intellectually serious way to criticisms of the premises of the argument.

Prerequisites/Corequisites: None

Materials (Texts) Needed for Class: All texts and materials will be provided.

Assignments: Final Essay Examination; Term Paper

Method of Assessing Student Achievement:

The extent to which students have achieved Student Learning Objectives (1b) and (2a) will be assessed by observing the level of *accuracy*, and the level of *thoroughness*, that is exhibited in their essays on the Final examination. The extent to which students have achieved Student Learning Objective (3a) will be assessed by observing the level of *precision in argument*, and the level of *awareness of objections*, that is exhibited in their term paper.

Basis of Grade Determination:

If your level of **attendance** (see below) is satisfactory, then:

Each of the two assignments is given a letter grade, which is given by the College a standard numerical value. The final grade in the course will be that letter grade whose standard numerical value is closest to the average of the numerical values of the two assignments (or the higher letter grade of two whose numerical values are tied for closeness to that average, if none is closer than those two; note that every number is the number which is closest to itself).

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is **required**, though with room for some **very** small number of excused absences. We are engaged in a very serious intellectual activity. Act accordingly.

Disability Policy:

“Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, Furst 412, akelsen@yu.edu during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter [to the Professors] to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations.”

Course Outline and Readings (readings will be posted on Canvas; or be otherwise available, e.g. online):

F Jan 19: Is Art Dangerous? Greek and Hebraic Perspectives
Plato, *Republic*, Book 10; Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, “On Depiction of Human Images on Stained Glass Windows in an Interfaith Chapel,” in *Covenant, Community, and Commitment*

F Jan 26: What is Beauty?

Roger Scruton, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction*

F Feb 2: What is Biblical Beauty?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "The Beauty of Holiness or the Holiness of Beauty"

C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, "The Fair Beauty of the Lord," parts 1 and 2

F Feb 9: Depicting Humanity and the Divine: Jerusalem vs. Athens

Book of Job, selections

Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, selections

Rabbi Aaron Lichtenstein, "*Mah Enosh*: Reflections on the Relation between Judaism and Humanism," and "Judaism and Greek Culture"

F Feb 16: The Meaning and Teaching of Tragedy in Art

Aristotle, *Poetics*, Book VI

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah "The Laws of Repentance," Chapter 5

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "The Echoes of Tragedy"

F Feb 23: Maimonides on Ethics and Aesthetics

Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, I:2

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, selections

F Mar 1: What is Humor? Philosophical and Biblical Understandings

Plato, *Philebus*, 47d-50e

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, I,I

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Commentary on the Torah*, Genesis, Chapters 17 and 21

F Mar 8: Is Food Art? Eating, Aesthetics, and Ethics

Leon Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature*

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *And From There You Shall Seek*, selections

Isaak Dinesen, "Babette's Feast"

F Mar 15 and F Mar 22: Music, Philosophy, and Faith

Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is"

Julian Dodd, "Defending Musical Platonism"

Aaron Ridley, "Against Musical Ontology"

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "The Torah as God's Song"

Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia*, selections

F Mar 29: Aesthetics in Mathematics (The Beauty of a Proof)

Presentation by Dr. Johnson

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, selections

F Apr 5: The Artist as Philosopher: Reading Van Gogh, Seeing Van Gogh
Vincent Van Gogh, *The Collected Letters of Van Gogh*

F Apr 12: Finding Philosophy in Art: Seeing Turner, Reading Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik
Joseph Soloveitchik, "Majesty and Humility"

F May 3: Concluding Reflection: Must All Goods Resemble God? A Modern Neoplatonist
Approach
Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, selections