

Aesthetics (6AANA034)

1. Module Description

This module introduces students to a number of key thinkers and debates within aesthetics and philosophy of art. The first half of the course will focus on four influential thinkers' work on the nature of art and beauty: in particular, Aquinas, Hume, Kant, and Hegel. Our focus will be on the nature of beauty, whether all artistic preferences are equally valid, the relationship between art and art theory, and the role of artworks in enshrining, sustaining, or undermining, social institutions. The second half of the course will focus on some core topics in contemporary aesthetics. Among these will be: can a work of art be immoral? Can I make something a work of art just by saying so? How do pictures represent? Can pornography be art? And what, if anything, determines the meaning of a work of art.

2. Assessment

This course will be assessed via two 2,500 word summative essays.

3. Secondary Texts

- Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*, New York: Routledge
- Peter Lamarque and Stein H. Olsen, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, *The Philosophy of Art*, New York: McGraw Hill

4. Outline of Weekly Topics and Readings

- Week 1: Introduction to Aesthetics
 - Alfred Lessing, “What’s Wrong with a Forgery?”
- Week 2: Aquinas
 - Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II
- Week 3: Hume
 - David Hume, “On the Standard of Taste”
- Week 4: Kant
 - Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, selections

- Week 5: Hegel
 - G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, selections
- Week 6: What is Art After Dada?
 - Arthur Danto, “The Artworld”
 - Tom Wolff, *The Painted Word*
- Week 7: Intention and Interpretation
 - Bill Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy”
 - Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”
- Week 8: Pictorial Representation
 - Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, selections
 - Richard Wollheim, “Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation”
- Week 9: Pornography
 - Martha Nussbaum, “Objectification”
 - Matthew Kieren, “Pornographic Art”
- Week 10: Ethics and Aesthetics
 - Noël Carroll, “Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research”
 - Anne W. Eaton, “Where Ethics and Aesthetics Meet”

5. Sample Formative Topics

- To what extent does Hume succeed in establishing a standard of taste? Why does the answer matter?
- Why, according to Kant, are judgments of beauty able to claim universal assent?
- Critically assess the relation between Hegel's vision of philosophy and his vision of art.
- Is something art if I say it is? If not, why not?
- How, according to Goodman, do pictures represent? How plausible is this?
- Can pornography ever count as art?