**PHIL 1900: “Philosophy of Art”**

**Instructor**: Lance H. Gracy, M.A.
 Teaching Fellow
 University of North Texas
 Department of Philosophy and Religion

**Time/Location:** Sec. 001 – MWF 10:00am – 10:50am | GAB 114
 Sec. 002 – MWF 11:00am – 11:50am | GAB 114 **Semester**:Spring 2025

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**Course Description.**

St. Thomas Aquinas once said: “The reason why the philosopher is compared to the poet is that both are concerned with wonders.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The philosophical study of art and aesthetics begins in wonder. More specifically, it begins with wondrous recognition of *the beautiful*. Beauty, as “that which gives joy or delight when seen or contemplated,” is an important subject for philosophy and art. But what is art more specifically, and how does it pertain to “the beautiful”? To make something beautiful requires, among other things, creativity and work. The Latin word, *ars*, from which we derive the word *art*, quite literally means *skillful work.* As Aristotle says in the opening of his *Metaphysics*: humans live by “art and reasonings” and questions such as, “What is art?”;“What makes something art?” and “What makes someone an artist?” must be assessed through reason and—to use another word employed by Aristotle associated with art—*intuition*.

In this course, we will evaluate and assess art philosophically, and by doing so we will work through a variety of ideas, concepts, controversies, principles and notions—for example, the intellectual virtues; the so-called “Platonic prejudice” that philosophy and art are antagonistic to each other; catharsis; hypothetical intentionalism; constructivism; arousal/infection models of emotion; erotetic narration; Augustine’s types of rhythm; Apollonian and Dionysian symbols/forms; and many others. We will read from Aristotle, Plato, Confucius, Plotinus, Boethius, St. Bonaventure, St. Augustine, Emerson, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Levinson, Hepburn, Du Bois, Benjamin, and others. By the end of this course, students should be thoroughly acquainted with key ideas in aesthetics and the philosophy of art.

**Required Text.**

Hick, Darren Hudson. *Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (3rd Edition). Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. ISBN: 978-1-3502-5675-0.[[2]](#footnote-2)



## **How to Succeed in this Course**

This course has digital components. To fully participate in this class, students will need internet access for content on the Canvas Learning Management System. Students will also need **pens** and **a notebook**.

**My pedagogy is inquiry-based, which means that students are primarily responsible for their learning and for ensuring they get the most out of this course. I expect students to come to class with questions about the reading and be willing to engage in philosophical discussion about content from the course.** Most of our class time will be spent in “lecture-mode” with students taking notes and posing questions to the instructor and class.

## **Statement on Success and the Learning Environment**

I value the perspectives students bring to my class. Please work with me to create a classroom culture of open communication and mutual respect. All discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, personal invective in philosophy class is inappropriate. See the [Code of Student Conduct](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Clance%5CDownloads%5CCode%20of%20Student%20Conduct).

Philosophy is not “activism.” Philosophy is not “being online.” At times you may find it very easy to react to a topic or idea you feel is heated or controversial. *It is okay that you feel this way.* Even so, in a philosophy classroom we must try to be as philosophical as we can possibly be – that is to say, we must do our best to live by “wisdom from above” because philosophy means “love of wisdom.” To be a part of such “loving wisdom” (*sapientia amorosa*) means, at the very least, to be *of* a disposition that is peaceable, gentle, introspective, willing to yield to others, patient, merciful, as non-hypocritical as possible, and so forth. It means trying to abide by the pillars of wisdom: of being moderate with one’s speech, of being innocent with one’s mind, of being regulatory concerning one’s passions, of being generous in one’s actions, of being simple about one’s intentions, and so on. To put it another way: loving wisdom means being *considerate.* As I like to say: focus on “no stone left unturned” instead of “throwing unturned stones at others.”

Here are some insights that will help you with this endeavor:

* **Be aware of the mission and purpose of the university.**
	+ *Inside Higher Ed* posted an article on this in the context of unrest on college campuses. One passage from it is particularly illuminating: “Students must be taught that the core purpose of college is not activism, but learning…Faculty and administrators should regularly remind students that freedom of speech ultimately serves the academic mission of college: to seek the truth together through rigorous yet respectful discourse using logic and evidence, not passions and talking points. Speech that coerces rather than persuades is antithetical to reasonable discourse and the academic mission of the university. Students cannot shout and listen at the same time. Neither can they simultaneously chant and reason. The academy is a forum, not a platform.”
* **Stop to consider the “diversity of ideas.”**
	+ Probably no two persons in the class hold *exactly the same* view on the issues/topics/etc. we will be looking at.
	+ Even if two people agree generally about some statement, their supporting reasons may differ, their emphasis may differ, etc.
	+ (I have witnessed more times than I can count people agreeing on something while having very different reasons for agreeing).
* **Intellectual honesty requires that we be willing to criticize bad arguments for positions that we agree with.**
	+ To criticize an argument for *p* is not the same as to argue against *p*. If you were to criticize an argument that was against bestiality, this does not mean that you approve of bestiality, much less practice it – it just means that you think the argument deserves criticism.
* **To claim that something someone is doing is wrong is not the same as to claim that the person is a bad person.**
	+ To provide just one example out of many: some believe it is morally wrong to eat animal meat. However, even *if* the act of eating meat is wrong, more conditions (such as intention, habit, occasion/circumstance, object, etc.) need to be met if one is to make a definitive judgment as to the moral character of, say, a “meat-eater.”
		- This is one reason why *personal* *invective* is inappropriate in a philosophy class.
* **It is quite possible for a person to defend an argument for a position that person does not hold (or defend an argument against a position that person does hold) as a “devil’s advocate.”**
	+ This happens a lot in philosophy. Playing “devil’s advocate” is very helpful because it allows philosophers to explore how defensible a position is. But why is that helpful? Because if we can respond to every objection we can think of, then that shows a position to be quite defensible. But if we find some strong objections along the way, then that shows the position not to be easily defensible. In other words, by playing “devil’s advocate” we come to a better sense of “strong” and “weak” arguments.
* **In doing philosophy, we proceed by reasoned argumentation.**
	+ This *does not mean* that appeals to authority or emotion are always wrong (after all, not every “appeal to authority” is fallacious and not every “appeal to emotion” is fallacious); all it means is that when one is proceeding by *unexamined* appeals to these things one just isn’t doing philosophy. And while this is so, philosophers can still look at non-philosophical views and ask whether these would bring to light a philosophical issue if those views were true, or whether they would fit well with philosophical conclusions.
		- Nevertheless, we should try to limit sentences that start with “I feel that …” since that does not leave much room for discussion. Instead say, “I think that …” or even better, “I think that … because …”
* **Learning is not always comfortable.**
* In this class we might talk about things that people find embarrassing or uncomfortable to talk about. I think this embarrassment is itself a philosophically interesting and healthy phenomenon. I’m not asking you to rid yourself of embarrassment. I’m also not judging you about your embarrassment. I’m not oblivious to the emotional struggles of college students. I don’t assume most students, especially freshmen, come to class as “indifferent intellectuals” but rather as people with emotional and life “baggage.” As a philosopher, I am aware of this reality and do my utmost to handle it with all care and due diligence.
* Having said all that, I also believe the classroom must be a place of intellectual and affective nourishment. In this way, the classroom does not exist for the sake of insulating us against whatever *might* cause discomfort. But that’s alright because discomfort can be used for one’s benefit—for one’s enhancement and advancement. Nietzsche even said: “Suffering has produced all the enhancements of man.” And C.S. Lewis once remarked: “In religion, as in war and *everything else*, comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth—only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair.” Contrarieties considered: these quotes in no way ring hollow.
* So, if you ever feel uncomfortable in class—(and it’s nevermy intention to make you feel uncomfortable; but if you do feel that way, consider it with respect to the above)—ask yourself: *Why do I feel this way?* St. Augustine and others have written on becoming a question to oneself. Indeed, becoming a question to oneself amid passionate energy can put the passions under the influence of the intellect, maximizing the learning experience in the process. I have learned to do this and let me say: it has, truly, served me well.
* **Lastly, I very much enjoy discussing philosophy outside the classroom, so please know that I am always open for one-on-one discussion in my office hours if you are interested in questioning an argument of mine, sharing a concern, talking about anything related to philosophy, or really anything else of importance to you.**

In addition to the above, I have also taken the time to compose a short document that contains some helpful tips on how you might make your time at college worthwhile.

Have a look.

## **Assessing Your Work**

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A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = 50-59

*Attendance, 20%*

This course utilizes a seating chat. By the second week of class, students should have already chosen a seat they would be content sitting in for the duration of the semester. I utilize a seating chart not only because it makes taking attendance easier (Canvas automatically calculates grades), but also because it makes learning your name easier. I take attendance at the start of each class. If you arrive late to class, *please inform me of your presence immediately following class. Do not email me about it; come up to me in person.*

*Reading Quizzes (x6), 25%*

Reading Quizzes are posted to Canvas. Quizzes consist of multiple-choice and
true/false questions. Students should expect quizzes to cover content from previous
classes/units.

*Short Writes (x4), 25%*

Short Writes are in-class responses to a prompt. Students will receive high grades
for completion (i.e., word-count) and for good grammar, good reasoning, and close
attention to the prompt. Failure to meet these requirements will result in a lower grade.

*Meaning-Making Assessment, 30%*

The Meaning-Making Assessment (MMA) may be thought of as a “final project.” Put simply, the MMA is an in-class presentation with a follow-up cross-examination that assesses the student’s knowledge about content from the course. The MMA is a small group project (three students per group). More details about this assignment can be found on Canvas.

## **Policies and Procedures**

**Extra credit opportunities may be provided at the instructor’s discretion. These are not guaranteed.**

**Late work is not accepted.**

**Absences can be excused with proper documentation.**

The course schedule is subject to change, especially in light of [Emergency Notifications and Procedures Policy (PDF)](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.049_Standard%20Syllabus%20Policy%20Statements_supplement.pdf).

Academic success depends on a variety of things, and personal negligence can be a major hindrance to an individual’s academic development. Please read and follow this important set of [guidelines for your academic success](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003). Students must always abide by the standards for academic integrity. See the [Academic Integrity Policy (PDF)](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.049_Standard%20Syllabus%20Policy%20Statements_supplement.pdf). Students who use another’s work without citations will be violating UNT’s Academic Integrity Policy. I have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to cheating, plagiarism, and academic dishonesty. I have failed students for such. If I catch you engaging in academic dishonesty, your grade for the course will be dealt with accordingly.

To learn more about student academic support services, please see the following list of resources: [Online Student Resources | Center for Learning, Experimentation, Application, and Research (unt.edu)](https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources).

If you have questions, please email me or discuss it with me during my office hours. During busy times, my inbox becomes rather full, so if you contact me and do not receive a response within two business days, send a follow up email. A gentle nudge is always appreciated. Feel free to email me with any questions, comments, or concerns you may have about the course. Be aware that **if you email me about something I have gone over repeatedly in class or something that has already been explained in the syllabus, I may not respond. If I “ignore” you in this way, my intention is not to be rude but to save time. As I see it, it is a waste of time for me to take time away from students that have made the effort to acquire an adequate sense of what is expected of them—to then give that time to students that *have not* made such an effort.**

***Technology Policy***

With the rise of improper use of artificial language models by ambitious young students, I have decided to implement a technology policy beginning Spring 2025. Course writing assignments (i.e., Short Writes) will now be completed during scheduled class time, and the use of all cell phones, personal computers, and the like is now prohibited during class time. Please leave the classroom if you want to use your cell phone.

## **ADA Accommodation Statement**

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodation at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability Access website at <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>. You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

## **Attendance and Participation**

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Research has shown that students who attend class are more likely to be successful. You should attend every class unless you have a university excused absence such as active military service, a religious holy day of observance or obligation, or an official university function as stated in the [Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy (PDF)](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.039_StudAttnandAuthAbsence.Pub2_.19.pdf). If you cannot attend a class due to an emergency, please let me know. Your safety and well-being are important to me. I respect students who are balancing the demands of their coursework with the responsibilities of caring for family members, keeping a job, and the like. Missing class due to an emergency does not count against your attendance grade insofar as documentation is provided.

**Nevertheless, *it is your responsibility to keep up with class.* Constant attendance and participation are essential to your academic success in this course as well as your comprehension of material delivered through this course.It is not my job to “spoon-feed” you, nor is it my job to “coddle” you. Serious college students lay learning to heart and take it seriously. Everyday challenges do not exempt you from the demands of learning.**

**So, show up, listen, observe, *seek*. Try to enjoy the “scholar’s garret” as much as you can!**

**PHIL 1900 COURSE SCHEDULE.[[3]](#footnote-3)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day/Date** | **Topic** | **Assignment** | **Reading** |
| **Week 1.** Monday (1/13) | **Introduction to Course** | Read Syllabus | Syllabus |
| Wednesday (1/15) | **Introduction to Philosophy** | Read Syllabus | What is Philosophy? |
| Friday (1/17)[[4]](#footnote-4) | **Introduction to Philosophy** | READ! | What is Philosophy? |
| **Week 2.** Monday (1/20)[[5]](#footnote-5) | **Introduction to Philosophy of Art: What Is Art?** | READ! | * Hick, *Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (pp. 1-17)
* Morris, “The Philosophy of Art”
 |
| Wednesday (1/22) | **What Is Art?** | READ! | * Aristotle, *Physics*, Bk 2, Chaps. 1-3
 |
| Friday (1/24)[[6]](#footnote-6) | **NO CLASS!** | **NO CLASS!** | **NO CLASS!** |
| **Week 3.** Monday (1/27) | **What is Art?** | READ! | * St. Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*
 |
| Wednesday (1/29) | **What is Art?** | READ! | * Excerpt from Jacobs’ *Seat of Wisdom* (pp. 268-280)
 |
| Friday (1/31)  | **What is Art?**  | READ! | * Plato, *The Republic*, Bk 7
 |
| **Week 4.** Monday (2/3) | **Philosophy vs. Art** | READ!**Reading Quiz 1—Due Sunday (2/9) by 11:59pm** | * Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (read beginning account of “Lady Philosophy”)
* Plato, *The Republic*, Bk 10
 |
| Wednesday (2/5) | **Philosophy vs. Art** | READ! | * Plato, *The Republic*, Bk 10 (cont’d)
 |
| Friday (2/7) | **Philosophy vs. Art** | READ! | * Unit Experiment: The Poetic Odes of William Wordsworth
 |
| **Week 5.** Monday (2/10) | **Ontology of Art** | READ! | * Hick, *Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (pp. 121-153)
 |
| Wednesday (2/12) | **Ontology of Art**  | READ! | * Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” (pp. 143- 165)
 |
| Friday (2/14) | **Ontology of Art**  | READ! | * Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” (pp. 165-185)
 |
| **Week 6.** Monday (2/17) | **Ontology of Art** | READ! | * Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” (pp. 185-203)
 |
| Wednesday (2/19) | **Ontology of Art** | READ! | * Gadamer, “The Ontology of the Work of Art and its Hermeneutical Significance”
 |
| Friday (2/21) | **Ontology of Art**. | READ! | * Gadamer, “The Ontology of the Work of Art and its Hermeneutical Significance”
 |
| **Week 7.** Monday (2/24) | **Literature, Interpretation, and Intention** | READ!**Reading Quiz 2—Due Sunday (3/2) by 11:59pm****Short Write 1** | * Hick, *Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (pp. 53-85)
 |
| Wednesday (2/26) | **Literature, Interpretation, and Intention** | READ! | * Hume, “On the Standard of Taste”
 |
| Friday (2/28) | **Literature, Interpretation, and Intention** | READ! | * Levinson, “Intention and Interpretation in Literature”
 |
| **Week 8.** Monday (3/3) | **Literature, Interpretation, and Intention** | READ! | * Levinson, “Intention and Interpretation in Literature”
 |
| Wednesday (3/5) | **Literature, Interpretation, and Intention** | READ! | * Stecker, “The Constructivist’s Dilemma”
 |
| Friday (3/7) | **Literature, Interpretation, and Intention** | READ! | * Unit Experiment: *Star Wars* and the Curious Case of Tom Bombadil
 |
| **WEEK 9.** **SPRING BREAK (3/10 – 3/16)** | **NO CLASS** | **NO CLASS** | **NO CLASS** |
| **Week 10.** Monday (3/17) | **Performance and Dramatic Arts: Movies, Music, and Theater** | READ!**Reading Quiz 3—Due Sunday (3/30) by 11:59pm****Short Write 2** | * Hick, *Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (pp. 155-184)
 |
| Wednesday (3/19)  | **Performance and Dramatic Arts: Movies, Music, and Theater** | READ! | * Carroll, “The Power of Movies”
 |
| Friday (3/21)  | **Performance and Dramatic Arts: Movies, Music, and Theater** | READ! | * Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*
 |
| **Week 11.** Monday (3/31) | **Performance and Dramatic Arts: Movies, Music, and Theater** | READ! | * Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*
 |
| Wednesday (4/2)  | **Performance and Dramatic Arts: Movies, Music, and Theater** | READ! | * St. Augustine, *On Music*
 |
| Friday (4/4) | **Performance and Dramatic Arts: Movies, Music, and Theater** | READ! | * Unit Experiment: Rhythms and Symbols in Movies
 |
| **Week 12.** Monday (4/7) | **Aesthetics of the Natural World** | READ!**Reading Quiz 4—Due Sunday (4/13) by 11:59pm****Short Write 3** | * Hick, *Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (pp. 255-283)
* St. Augustine, *Sermon 241* (1 page)
 |
| Wednesday (4/9)  | **Aesthetics of the Natural World** | READ! | * Hepburn, “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty”
 |
| Friday (4/11)[[7]](#footnote-7)  | **Aesthetics of the Natural World** | READ! | * Plotinus, *Ennead*, I, iv
* Confucius, “The Case of Uglyface T’o” (1 page)
 |
| **Week 13.** Monday (4/14) | **Aesthetics of the Natural World** | READ! | * Emerson, *Nature* (pp. 1-24)
 |
| Wednesday (4/16) | **Aesthetics of the Natural World** | READ! | * Emerson, *Nature* (pp. 24-39)
 |
| Friday (4/18) | **Aesthetics of the Natural World** | READ! | * Emerson, *Nature* (concluding)
 |
| **Week 14.** Monday (4/21) | **Art & the Socio-Political** | READ!**Reading Quiz 5—Due Sunday (4/27) by 11:59pm****Short Write 4** | * Hick, *Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (pp. 185-213)
 |
| Wednesday (4/23) | **Art & the Socio-Political** | READ! | * Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing” (pp. 488-508)
 |
| Friday (4/25) | **Art & the Socio-Political** | READ! | * Du Bois, “All Art is Propaganda”
 |
| **Week 15.** Monday (4/28) | **Art & the Socio-Political** | READ! | * Locke, “The Distinction Between Art and Propaganda”
 |
| Wednesday (4/30) | **Art & the Socio-Political** | READ! | * Benjamin, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”
 |
| Friday (5/2) | **NO CLASS** | **NO CLASS****Reading Quiz 6—Due Sunday (5/4) by 11:59pm** | **NO CLASS** |
| **Week 16.** Final Exam Week (5/3 – 5/9) |  | MMA PROJECT PRESENTATIONS |  |
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1. *CM* 1.3.55. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This text serves as an *introductory primer* to aesthetics and the philosophy of art. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The instructor reserves the right to make modifications and/or adjustments to the syllabus at his discretion. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Last day to drop a class section without a ‘W.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. No class. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Drop with a grade of ‘W’ begins on Jan. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Last day to drop a course or all courses with a grade of ‘W.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)