

# Topics in Ethics: The Intersection of Ethics and Aesthetics

## Phil 241: Winter 2010

Instructor: Elizabeth Scarbrough  
Class Times: Wed. & Fri: 1:30 pm – 3:20 pm  
Instructor Office Hours: 12:20 pm -1:20 pm WF  
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### **Course Description**

The focus of this course is on the intersection of ethics and aesthetics. This is a 200 level course; although no previous instruction in ethics or aesthetics is required, familiarity with normative ethics and/or aesthetics is helpful. At least one previous course in philosophy is recommended. The course will begin with an introduction to normative ethics, with a focus on how to apply these ethical constructs to issues in aesthetics. We will briefly discuss: Utilitarianism, Kantianism, Virtue Ethics, and Pluralism. After our unit on normative ethics, we will turn to the following issues in aesthetics: issues in public art (Should tax dollars be spent on public art? Can we destroy works of public art? What should the aim of public art be?), ethical issues in kitsch & sentimentality (Do sentimental or kitschy artworks engage us in morally bad forms of self-deception?), fakes & forgeries (Is the fact that an artwork is a forgery merely a moral flaw in its creation, or is it also an aesthetic flaw?), and the moral criticism of art (Are artworks immune from moral criticism? Can artworks that depict morally bad content have positive aesthetic value?). There will be several short writing assignments, a midterm and a final.

### **Required Textbooks (2):**

Timmons, Moral Theory (\$10 used, \$30 new) (MT)  
Neill, Arguing about Art (\$20 used, \$39 new) (AA)

Any other readings will be available electronically or distributed in class. The readings are listed by the class dates when we will begin discussing them; you should read the assigned reading **prior** to coming to class that day.

### **Schedule of Topics and Reading:**

#### **Unit 1: Background in Normative Ethics (Weeks 1-3.5)**

*The aim of this unit is to give a very basic background in normative ethics. The readings are exclusively from Timmons – no historical readings will be done (Timmons does quote historical readings). Consequentialism (Utilitarianism), Deontic theories (Ross & Kant), Virtue Ethics (Aristotle), and Pluralism will be covered.*

#### **1/6 (Wed) Introduction to Topic**

Introduction to Ethics

Discussion of the main divisions in ethics (MT pg. 19 – reference only)

Brief discussion of moral relativism (MT Chapter 3 – reference only)

1/8 (Fri) **CONSEQUENTIALISM**

Introduction to Classical Utilitarianism: Bentham & Mill

MT Chapter 1: Subsections 1,2,3,6 only (p. 1-7, 12-17)

MT Chapter 5: Classical Utilitarianism (p. 103-121)

1/13 (Wed) **UTILITARIANISM**

Problems with Utilitarianism

MT Chapter 6: p. 131-142

1/15 (Fri) **DEONTOLOGY AND ROSS / KANT**

Ross on Prima Facie Duties and Introduction to Kantianism

MT Chapter 8: p. 193 - 198

MT Chapter 7: p. 151-174

1/20 (Wed) **KANTIANISM**

The Categorical Imperative (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> formulations), Problems with Kantianism

MT Continue Chapter 7: p. 151-174

1/22 (Fri) **INTRO VIRTUE ETHICS**

Aristotle and Virtuous Agents

\*Assign first reading response paper (mandatory)

MT Chapter 9: p. 211-224, p. 232-233

1/27 (Wed) **VIRTUE ETHICS & CONCLUDING REMARKS ON PLURALISM**

Pluralist Virtue Ethics, Concluding Remarks on Pluralism

\*First reading response paper due (mandatory)

MT Finish Chapter 9: p. 211-224, p. 232-233

MT Additional Chapter 11: p. 267-270

**Unit 2: Public Art**

*The aim of this unit is to apply the concepts we learned in the unit of Normative Ethics to the Tilted Arc controversy.*

1/29 (Fri) **TILTED ARC**

Begin talking about *Tilted Arc*, in terms of what we learned in our first unit. Then, assign groups for debate assignment to happen on 2/5. Three assigned readings:

E-Reserve: Selections from The Destruction of Tilted Arc: Documents:

-Chronology of events (p. 1-2), Introduction to public hearing (p.58), Artist Statement Oldenburg (p. 77-79), Artist Statement Gray (p. 121-122), Various Court documents (skim: p. 199-205, 206-218)

-(more readings listed on page 3)

AA: "Transcript of the Controversy over Public Art" (p. 399-405)  
AA: "Public Art/Public Space " - Gregg Horowitz (p. 416-427)

2/3 (Wed) **TILTED ARC & BEYOND** (Destroying works of art – should it be done?)  
Talk about how to apply issues in Tilted Arch to other issues in aesthetics & morality, namely the destruction of artworks.

\*Assign second reading response paper

AA: "Public art controversy: the Serra and Lin cases" – M. Kelly (p.427-441)  
E-Reserve: "Destroying Works of Art" - James Young

2/5 (Fri) **TILTED ARC DEBATE**

Finish discussing articles on Tilted Arc and have our debate on Tiled Arc. No additional assigned reading.

### **Unit 3: Kitsch & Sentimentality**

*Do sentimental or kitschy artworks engage us in morally bad forms of self-deception?  
This unit discusses whether or not certain works of art can be (morally) bad for us.*

2/10 (Wed) **INTRODUCTION TO KITSCH**

We will start with the classic article, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" by the influential art critic Clement Greenberg. This will serve as our historical background to the reading.

\*Second reading response paper due

E-Reserve: "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" – Clement Greenberg (historical reading)  
AA: "Sentimentality" - Anthony Saville (p.337-342)

2/12 (Fri) **KITSCH AND SENTIMENTALITY**

\*Third reading response paper assigned

AA: "The Alleged Unwholesomeness of Sentimentality"– Newman (p.342-354)  
E-Reserve: "On Kitsch and Sentimentality" -Robert Solomon

2/17 (Wed) **REVIEW / MIDTERM**

You will have an opportunity to ask questions before taking the midterm. The midterm is designed to last 50 minutes long and will consist of a series of short in-class essays.

### **Unit 4: Fakes and Forgeries**

Is the fact that an artwork is a forgery merely a moral flaw in its creation, or is it also an aesthetic flaw? (If we have time, we will watch some of Orson Welles' masterpiece, "*F is for Fake*." I suggest you read the Wikipedia entry on one of the most famous art forgers, Elmyr de Hory.)

2/19 (Fri) **INTRODUCTION TO FAKES**

Finish up Solomon piece (if need be).

\*Third reading response paper due  
*-(readings listed on page 4)*

AA: "What's Wrong with Forgery?" Alfred Lessing (p. 89-102)

AA: "Artistic Crimes" Denis Dutton (p. 102-112)

2/24 (Wed) **FAKES**

E-Reserve: "Art and Authenticity" Nelson Goodman

E-Reserve: "Art, Forgery, and Authenticity" – Joseph Margolis (read 1<sup>st</sup> half)

2/26 (Fri) **FAKES**

No additional readings

Finish "Art, Forgery, and Authenticity" – Joseph Margolis

\*Assign fourth reading response paper

**Unit 5: How can we morally judge art?**

This unit focuses on the moral assessment of art. The readings are more difficult than in the previous units.

3/3 (Wed) **INTRODUCTION MORALITY AND ART**

E-Reserve: "The Ethical Criticism of Art" - Berys Gaut

3/5 (Fri) **SURVEY OF MAJOR ISSUES IN THE TOPIC**

E-Reserve: "Art and Ethical Criticism" - Noel Carroll

\*Fourth reading response paper due

3/10 (Wed) **MORALITY IN FICTION**

E-Reserve: "Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality" – Kendall Walton

\*Last (fifth) reading response paper assigned

3/12 (Fri) **MORALLY JUDGING ART**

Depending on class discussions, I will pick one or two of the following articles (all can be found on E-Reserve):

1. "On The Cognitive Triviality of Art" - Jerome Stolnitz

2. "Goodness Knows Nothing of Beauty" - William Gass

3. "The Ethical Significance of Modern Art" - Karsten Harries

\*Final reading response paper will be due no later than 3/17, the Wednesday of finals week.

3/15 (Mon) **FINAL EXAM MONDAY**

The final exam will be held: Monday, March 15, 2010, 230-420 pm, SAV 139

The final will focus on (but not be exclusive to) issues discussed after the midterm. It will be slightly longer than the midterm.

3/17 (Wed) **No Class: Final Reading Response Paper Due**

## **GRADING PROCEDURES:**

Class Participation: 10 discretionary points

In Class Quizzes: (5 quizzes at 5 points each) 25 points

Reading Response Papers: (4 papers at 15 points each) 60 points

Midterm Exam: 60 points

Final Exam: 85 points

\* I do not intend to curve the grades for this course, but I will, at my discretion, give a bonus of .1 to the final decimal grade of those students who show significant improvement over the course of the term.

### Participation (10 points )

10 points are allocated toward active engagement in the class.

I expect students to be actively participating in class (which includes active listening). A portion of your grade is dedicated to your active participation.

The use of cell phones in class is strictly forbidden. Laptop computers may only be used for academic purposes. Violating this “No surfing. No texting.” policy may result in a lowered participation grade.

### In Class Quizzes (25 points )

There will be a total of 5 in-class quizzes. The quizzes will be composed of questions similar to those found on the midterm examination. The quizzes will not be announced in advance.

### Reading Response Papers (60 points )

There will be four reading response papers required for this class. Each paper should be roughly 1-2 double-spaced pages long (you are free to write more if you'd like). Five paper topics will be given a week before reading response papers are due. The first paper topic is mandatory, and you are to choose which three of the four remaining topic to write on.

### Midterm / Final (145 points total )

There will be two examinations in this course: a midterm (60 points) and a final (85 points).

Late exams will not be given unless you have made prior arrangements with me. In cases of documented illness or emergency, contact me as soon as possible to make arrangements.

## **Total Possible Points: 240**

A 4.0-3.9 - 95% of total possible points (228)

A- 3.8-3.5 -90% of total possible points (216)

B+ 3.4-3.2 - 87% of total possible points (208)

B 3.1-2.9 - 84% of total possible points (201)

B- 2.8-2.5 - 80% of total possible points (192)

C+ 2.4-2.2 - 77% of total possible points (184)

C 2.1-1.9 - 74% of total possible points (177)

C- 1.8-1.5 - 70% of total possible points (168)

D+ 1.4-1.2 - 67% of total possible points (160)

D 1.1-0.9 - 64% of total possible points (153)

D- 0.8-0.7- 60% of total possible points (144)

## DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY: INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS\*

### **COURSES, GRADING, ACADEMIC CONDUCT**

#### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is defined as the use of creations, ideas or words of publicly available work without formally acknowledging the author or source through appropriate use of quotation marks, references, and the like. Plagiarizing is presenting someone else's work as one's own original work or thought. This constitutes plagiarism whether it is intentional or unintentional. The University of Washington takes plagiarism very seriously. Plagiarism may lead to disciplinary action by the University against the student who submitted the work. Any student who is uncertain whether his or her use of the work of others constitutes plagiarism should consult the course instructor for guidance before formally submitting the course work involved. (Sources: *UW Graduate School Style Manual*; *UW Bothell Catalog*; *UW Student Conduct Code*)<sup>1</sup>

#### **Incompletes**

An incomplete is given only when the student has been in attendance and has done satisfactory work until within two weeks of the end of the quarter and has furnished proof satisfactory to the instructor that the work cannot be completed because of illness or other circumstances beyond the student's control. (Source: *UW General Catalog Online*, "Student Guide/Grading")

#### **Grade Appeal Procedure**

A student who believes he or she has been improperly graded must first discuss the matter with the instructor. If the student is not satisfied with the instructor's explanation, the student may submit a written appeal to the chair of the Department of Philosophy with a copy of the appeal also sent to the instructor. The chair consults with the instructor to ensure that the evaluation of the student's performance has not been arbitrary or capricious. Should the chair believe the instructor's conduct to be arbitrary or capricious and the instructor declines to revise the grade, the chair, with the approval of the voting members of his or her faculty, shall appoint an appropriate member, or members, of the faculty of the Department of Philosophy to evaluate the performance of the student and assign a grade. The Dean and Provost should be informed of this action. Once a student submits a written appeal, this document and all subsequent actions on this appeal are recorded in written form for deposit in a School file. (Source: *UW General Catalog Online*, "Student Guide/Grading")

#### **Concerns About a Course, an Instructor, or a Teaching Assistant**

If you have any concerns about a Philosophy course or your instructor, please see the instructor about these concerns as soon as possible. If you are not comfortable talking with the instructor or not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may contact the chair of the program offering the course (names available from the Department of Philosophy, 361 Savery Hall). For your

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\* Adapted from material prepared by the UW Department of History and used with permission.

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth: I take academic honesty extremely seriously and will pursue sanctions against any student(s) caught engaging in any form of academic misconduct, in accordance with the University of Washington Student Conduct Code, which can be found at:

<http://www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html#020> You can find additional information about what constitutes plagiarism/academic dishonesty at:

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/issue1/honesty.htm#plagiarism>. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ask me. Ignorance of policies regarding academic misconduct does not constitute a legitimate excuse for inappropriate behavior (*Ignorantia legis non excusat!*).

reference, these procedures are posted on a Philosophy bulletin board outside the Department of Philosophy main office on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Savery Hall.

## **POLICIES, RULES, RESOURCES**

### **Equal Opportunity**

The University of Washington reaffirms its policy of equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, or status as a disabled veteran or Vietnam-era veteran in accordance with University of Washington policy and applicable federal and state statutes and regulations.

### **Disability Accommodation**

The University of Washington is committed to providing access, equal opportunity and reasonable accommodation in its services, programs, activities, education and employment for individuals with disabilities. For information or to request disability accommodation contact: Disabled Students Services (Seattle campus) at (206) 543-8924/V, (206) 543-8925/TTY, (206) 616-8379/Fax, or e-mail at [uwdss@u.washington.edu](mailto:uwdss@u.washington.edu); Bothell Student Affairs at (425) 352-5000/V; (425) 352-5303/TTY, (425) 352-5335/Fax, or e-mail at [uwbothel@u.washington.edu](mailto:uwbothel@u.washington.edu); Tacoma Student Services at (253) 552-4000/V, (253) 552-4413/TTY, (253) 552-4414/Fax.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment is defined as the use of one's authority or power, either explicitly or implicitly, to coerce another into unwanted sexual relations or to punish another for his or her refusal, or as the creation by a member of the University community of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or educational environment through verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. If you believe that you are being harassed, seek help—the earlier the better. You may speak with your instructor, your teaching assistant, the undergraduate advisor (363 Savery Hall), graduate program assistant (366 Savery Hall), or the chair of the Philosophy Department (364 Savery Hall). In addition, you should be aware that the University has designated special people to help you. They are: University Ombudsman and Ombudsman for Sexual Harassment (for complaints involving faculty members and teaching assistants) Susan Neff, 301 Student Union (HUB), 543-6028; and the University Complaint Investigation and Resolution Office, 616-2028. (*Sources: UW Graduate School, CIDR, Office of the President*)

### **Office of Scholarly Integrity**

The Office of Scholarly Integrity is housed in the Office of the Vice-Provost. The Office of Scholarly Integrity assumes responsibility for investigating and resolving allegations of scientific and scholarly misconduct by faculty, students, and staff of the University of Washington. The Office of Scholarly Integrity coordinates, in consultation and cooperation with the Schools and Colleges, inquiries and investigations into allegations of scientific and scholarly misconduct. The Office of Scholarly Integrity is responsible for compliance with reporting requirements established by various Federal and other funding agencies in matters of scientific or scholarly misconduct. The Office of Scholarly Integrity maintains all records resulting from inquiries and investigations of such allegations. University rules (Handbook, Vol. II, Section 25-51, Executive Order #61) define scientific and scholarly misconduct to include the following forms of inappropriate activities: intentional misrepresentation of credentials; falsification of data; plagiarism; abuse of confidentiality; deliberate violation of regulations applicable to research. Students can report cases of scientific or scholarly misconduct either to the Office of Scholarly Integrity, to their faculty adviser, or the department chair. The student should report such problems to whomever he or she feels most comfortable. (*Sources: UW web page (<http://www.grad.washington.edu/OSI/osi.htm>); minutes of Grad School Executive Staff and Division Heads meeting, 7/23/98*)