New York University  
Gallatin School of Individualized Study  
Fall 2016  
IDSEM-UG1795: Art and Ethics  
1 Washington Place, Room 527  
Thursdays 620PM-900PM  

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Course Description

The relationship between art and ethics has been a significant philosophical problem since antiquity and one that continues to engage us. While some argue that art is autonomous from ethics, others insist that ethics is a necessary component of art and of one’s aesthetic judgment of the work. This course explores the various positions that have been taken in this debate and raises several key questions: Can art be morally enlightening and, if so, how? If a work of art is morally better, does that make it better as art? Is morally deficient art to be shunned, or even censored? Do subjects of artworks have rights as to how they are represented? Do artists have duties as artists and duties as human beings, and if so, to whom? How much tension is there between the demands of art and the demands of life? These questions will be examined through the lens of painting (Rembrandt, Picasso), cinema (Riefenstahl, Truffaut, Reed, Pasolini), photography (Mapplethorpe, Mann), public art (Serra, Lin) and literature (Nabokov) with readings drawn from Plato, Horace, Tolstoy, Wilde, Danto, as well as other contemporary philosophers and critics.

Required Materials


All other required readings (READINGS 1-10) are posted on the “Resources” section of our NYU Classes site.

Learning Goals

- Students will become familiar with the long historical debate regarding the relationship of art to ethics in the Western intellectual tradition  
- Students will clarify and understand the notions of the aesthetic and the ethical  
- Students will examine the intrinsic issue of the relation of the aesthetic value of artworks to their ethical value through critically reading and writing about specific case studies in painting, cinema, photography, public art, and literature
Requirements

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Class/Online Contribution</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Essay (5 pages)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Essay (8-10 pages)</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi-Weekly Assignments</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral Presentation</td>
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Description of Requirements

Active Class/Online Contribution: Active, diligent participation in class and online in our NYU Classes discussion forums is absolutely necessary. The course depends on open, flowing discussion. Ideally, you should feel comfortable enough to speak out whenever an idea arises as if you are speaking to a group of friends or colleagues (which you are). Always come to class prepared, having critically read and taken notes on the reading material. Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class. Regular attendance and lively participation are absolutely necessary in this course. Missing one is understandable, but if you are absent more than once this semester, your course grade will suffer and, in extreme cases, you may even fail the course. If illness or other urgent matters require you to be absent more than once, please speak to your advisor and to the instructor immediately. (Please note that a grade of “Incomplete” can only be negotiated in advance and only in extraordinary situations related to health and family emergencies). Perpetual lateness is also basis for penalty. Every three times late will be counted as one absence (perpetually coming late to class is very disruptive to the group dynamic). In the event that you are absent, you should email a classmate (not the instructor) to find out exactly what you missed in order that you do not fall too far behind. However, I cannot stress how important it is to be on time, present, alert, and active in class – both for your sake and for that of your classmates, especially since we meet only once per week.

Midterm Essay: A five-page midterm essay will be due via email by 11pm, Sunday, October 23. The specific assignment will be made available approximately two weeks before the due date and time will be spent in class developing topics and approaches to writing the essay.

Final Essay: An eight-ten page final essay will be due via email by 11pm, Tuesday, December 20. Unlike the midterm essay, the final essay will be more open-ended in that it will require that students either (1) analyze a specific artistic case study (whether it is one that was discussed in class or not) in order to come to some conclusion concerning the relationship between ethics and aesthetics or (2) write an argumentative research paper on some aspect of the long historical debate regarding the relationship of art to ethics in the Western intellectual tradition. The final essay assignment will be made available approximately three weeks before the essay is due.

Semi-Weekly Assignments: 1-2 page writing assignment will be due approximately every two weeks. The assignments will vary, but they will usually require that students offer a summary, analysis, and/or reaction to a particular reading or case study. These assignments will be emailed to the class one week before they are due. Completed assignments should be posted to the appropriate Forum on NYU Classes by 12PM (noon) on the date they are due.

Oral Presentation: A ten minute oral presentation based on the final essay project is required by each student in class on December 15. During the oral presentation, students should clearly articulate their topics, approaches, and preliminary conclusions. Students will also be encouraged to raise questions and interact with the class as much as possible.
Academic Honesty

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. For a full description of the academic integrity policy, see [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)

Miscellaneous

- Please power down and put away all electronic devices before class begins.
- We will have a fifteen-minute break sometime during each class session.
- We will attempt to have at least one outside class activity (voluntary, extra credit attendance).

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART I: INTRODUCTION – ART AND ETHICS: THE LONG DEBATE

September 8:
Course Introduction.
Case Study: Rembrandt vs. Drost (Two Bathshebas)

September 15:
Plato, Ion and Republic (READING 1)
Horace, “The Art of Poetry” (READING 2)
Tolstoy, “What is Art?” (READING 3)
Wilde, “On the Decay of Lying” and Preface to The Portrait of Dorian Grey (READING 4)
Gaut, “The Ethical Criticism of Art” (AE)

PART II: CINEMA

September 22:
Devereaux, “Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl’s Triumph of the Will” (AE)
Case Study: Riefenstahl, Triumph of the Will

Writing Assignment 1 Due

September 29:
Hanson, “How Good Can Bad Art Be?” (AE)
Hanson, “Love and Friendship in the Balance: The Case of Jules et Jim” (EC)
Case Study: Truffaut, Jules et Jim

October 6:
Driver, “Justice, Mercy, and Friendship in The Third Man” (EC)
Knight, The Third Man: Ethics, Aesthetics, Irony” (EC)
Wartenberg, “Moral Intelligence and the Limits of Loyalty: The Third Man as Philosophy” (EC)
Case Study: Reed, The Third Man

Writing Assignment 2 Due
October 13:
Case Study: Pasolini, *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*

October 20:
**Midterm Essay Workshop (Midterm Essay Due via Email, Sunday, October 23)**

**PART III: PHOTOGRAPHY**

October 27:
Danto, *Playing with the Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe* (READING 5)
Danto, “The Naked Truth” (AE)
Film Screening: *Mapplethorpe: Look at the Pictures*
Case Study: Photography of Robert Mapplethorpe

November 3:
Mann, Sally. *Hold Still: A Memoir with Photographs* (HS)
Case Study: Photography of Sally Mann
**Writing Assignment 3 Due**

**PART IV: PUBLIC ART**

November 10:
Various Contributors, “Transcript of a hearing to decide the future of *Tilted Arc*” (READING 6)
Horowitz, “Public Art / Public Space: The Spectacle of the *Tilted Arc Controversy*” (READING 7)
Kelly, “Public Art Controversy: the Serra and Lin Cases” (READING 8)
Case Study: Serra, *Tilted Arc* and Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*
**Writing Assignment 4 Due**

**PART V: FICTION**

November 17:
Walton, “Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality” (READING 9)
Tanner, “Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality: A Response” (READING 9)
Case Study: Nabokov, *Lolita* (AL)

November 24:
**No Class. Happy Thanksgiving!**

December 1:
Gaut, “Lolita” from *Art, Emotion, and Ethics* (READING 10)
Case Study: Nabokov, *Lolita* (AL)
**Writing Assignment 5 Due**

December 8:
**Final Essay Workshop**

December 15:
**Oral Presentations**
**Final Essay Due via email 11pm, Tuesday, December 20**