Art and Social Epistemology

PHIL 5192/6192 and **5800/6800**

Tues 2-5 pm, CTIHB 459

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Office Hours: Tues 12:30-1:30 pm and by appointment

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Office Hours: 12:30-1:30 pm Tuesday and by appointment

This class will focus on the political and social qualities of art. There are two primary questions:

1. In what way can art *reflect and transmit* socio-political values, biases, and viewpoints?
2. Are there ways in which art could be *better* for communicating certain kinds of socio-political values, understandings, and viewpoints, than more straightforward and explicit modes of communication?

This class is an attempt to explore and expand on a set of connections that are relatively new to philosophy. It connects two sub-disciplines of philosophy.

The first is *social epistemology*. This is the study of knowledge as a social phenomenon. Social epistemology asks questions like: how do we trust each other? How do we work together to create knowledge and understanding? How do systematic biases infect our communications, and our attempts to build knowledge together?

The second is aesthetics. This is the study of art, beauty, and related phenomenon. Aesthetics asks questions like: what is the value of art and beauty? What makes art distinctive? What are the special powers of literature, painting, film, memes? What is art especially good at communicating, expressing, or embodying?

At the junction of these fields is a new set of questions, about the potential special place of art in our social life. Many of these topics are embodied in one of the inspirations for this class, poet-activist Audre Lorde's "Poetry is Not. A Luxury". There, Lorde argues that clear language is usually under the control of socially dominant groups and well-suited to express their typical experiences. But socially marginalized groups often have less language to express their particular experiences. And that poetry – and art in general – is

the special place where we can invent new language, to express those otherwise hard-to-express experiences.

This is a relatively new set of connections in philosophy, so there's only a little literature directly connecting these topics. We'll be spending a lot of time reading key background literature from both sub-disciplines, and making the connections ourselves.

This is the first time this particular syllabus has been taught. *This* means that the class is pretty experimental, and very malleable according to student interests. All readings listed here are provisional. Bright side: we can change the class to suit your needs! Down side: the syllabus can change. I'll try to keep everything stable within a two-week future window so you can read and plan ahead, but please check the online syllabus regularly for changes to the readings.

Course materials:

One small book: Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*. Used copies available easily online. Everything else for the course is online, either linked below or in the Files section of Canvas.

Grading and assignments for 5192/5800:

Reading Responses	10%
Midterm	10%
Final	20%
Short paper	20%
Final paper	30%
Participation/quizzes	10%

Undergraduate students will be required to write 2 reading explications, on the readings of their choice. Each explication will be 1-2 double-spaced pages, in which you will present the main line of argument of the text and provide a brief criticism. The first explication is due in the first two weeks of class, the second in the next two weeks of class.

The first short paper will be a 3-4 page paper explicating and responding to a paper from the class. The second paper will be a 5-7 page paper, which you'll have a lot of freedom with. We'll also workshop outlines for that paper, and a first draft of that paper, in-class.

The take-home midterm and take-home final are relatively painless exams that will ask you to answer broad, synthetic questions, connecting up various ideas from the class.

Exams will be unproctored, open-book exams, that you will have two days to complete, and should take you about 2 hours.

If the class is nice and I get the sense that everybody is reading, everybody will get 10% of their grade as a freebie. If the class is not nice and I get the sense that people aren't reading, I will switch this to reading pop quizzes.

Late policy: Late papers will automatically be downgraded by Canvas 3% per day late, down to a maximum of a 50% late penalty. I am happy to give extensions for any reason, but you *must ask me at least three days ahead of time*. Exceptions made for cases of medical/family/personal emergencies.

Grading and assignments for 6192/6800:

Reading explications	10%
Presentation	10%
Take-home midterm	10%
Take-home final	10%
Term paper	60%

Graduate students are required to write 3 reading explications, on the readings of their choice. Each explication will be 2-3 double-spaced pages, in which you will explicate the main argument of one of the readings (or give a detailed explication of a sub-argument). Each reading explication is due by midnight the night before class.

Each graduate student will select one paper to give a presentation on one paper during class, in which they will give a 30 minute presentation and then lead discussion for 30 minutes. (Or you can mix it all up for an hour, which is probably preferable.)

Graduate students will take the same take-home exams as undergraduates, but the standards for analysis and response will be appropriately higher.

The graduate student term-paper will be a 15-20 page paper. You have a fair amount of freedom – you may explicate and respond in detail to a reading; or synthesize and connect several of the papers; or present your own novel view. We'll work together to shape the direction of the paper.

PART II. READING LIST

Readings are due on the listed date. Class discussion will assume you've read the text; I'll re-explain the text when it's difficult, but for easier texts, we'll just start discussing it. You'll often miss out on much of the point of a class if you haven't already read the texts ahead of time.

All weeks have two main readings; occasionally I will add a very short "case study". Some weeks have an "optional" reading. *That optional reading is required for graduate students*; these readings won't be the primary topic of discussion, but will provide more background context, additional arguments, or more case studies, to weave into discussion.

All readings are to PDFs in the Files section of Canvas, unless the reading is hyper-linked, in which case it's online.

All assignments are due online. For workshop days, also bring hard-copies of your assignments.

This schedule is subject to change. I'm open to student input about what topics are exciting, and which we should explore more deeply! Changes will be announced in lecture and on Canvas.

Week 1 Opening Connections Aug 20

Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury"

Jerome Stolnitz, "The Aesthetic Attitude"

Week 2 What's Special About Art? Aug 27

Selections from *Aesthetics* reader, ed. Susan Feagin and Patrick Maynard

John Dewey, "Having an Experience"

Optional: Bence Nanay, "Experience and Attention"

Week 3 Epistemic Injustice Sep 3

Miranda Fricker, excerpts from *Epistemic Injustice*

Annette Baier, "Trust and Anti-trust"

Optional: Patricia Hill Collins, excerpts from *Black Feminist Thought*

Week 4 Poetic Justice Sep 10

Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, Chapters 1-3

Optional: Chapter 4

Week 5 Narrative and Perspective Shifting Sep 17

Olivia Bailey, "Empathy, Sensibility, and the Novelist's Imagination"

Elizabeth Camp, "Perspectives in Imaginative Engagement with Fiction"

Week 6 Standpoint Epistemology Sep 24

Briana Toole, "From Standpoint Epistemology to Epistemic Oppression

5000-level: Short paper outline workshop in class. Bring 4 hardcopies for an in-class exercise

Week 7 Art as Expression Oct 1

Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*

https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.188470

Chpt. 2 "Art and Craft"

Chpt. 6 "Art Proper: (1) as Expression"

Optional: Chpt 7. "Art Proper: (2) as Imagination"

Take-home midterm due Oct 4

Week 8 FALL BREAK

Week 9 Beat up on the Professor Day Oct 15

Professor out of town, grad student presentations on some of my work on this topic, free-for-all rumble.

Short paper due October 18

Week 10 Aesthetic Injustice and Society Oct 22

Rachel Fraser, “Aesthetic Injustice”

John Dewey, “Art and Civilization”

Week 11 Perspectives and Understanding Oct 29

Elizabeth Camp, “Perspectives and Ultimate Understanding”

Olivia Bailey, “Empathy and the Value of Humane Understanding"

Week 12 Metaphor Nov 5

Elizabeth Camp, “Metaphors and that Certain Je Ne Sais Quois”

Rachel Fraser, “The Ethics of Metaphor

Week 13 Workshopping Day For All! Nov 12

C. Thi Nguyen and Ethan Nowak, “Slang is Better” draft

Outline workshop day – bring 4 hardcopies of your final paper outline to class

Week 14 Exploration and Play Nov 19

Ryan Muldoon and Michael Weisberg, “Epistemic Landscapes”

Maria Lugones, “Playfulness, World-Travelling, and Loving Attention”

Week 15 Topic TBA Nov 26

Selected by class interest!

Week 16 **Topic TBA** **Dec 3**

Selected by class interest!

Draft workshop day! Drafts due online before class. Bring hard-copies to class

Final Exam Tuesday, Dec 10 1:00 – 3:00 pm

Final papers due Dec 12

PART III. OTHER COURSE POLICIES

Office hours:

I would love to meet with you to chat about the course, your work, and all that. Drop by scheduled office hours, or I'm more than happy to make an appointment for in-person or Zoom chats.

Professor contact schedule:

In order to maintain a minimum of work/life balance, I try to keep university-related emailing to a normal work schedule. I have separate personal and university e-mail accounts, and I try to only check my university e-mail account on normal working hours – 9-6, M-F. Don't expect quick responses to e-mails outside of those hours! In exchange, I've tried to keep the course assignments and deadlines to respect normal working hours for you too – so no Saturday night due dates.