

# Bad Art, Bad Taste, & Bad Artists

Philosophy 123 | Spring 2023



## Meeting Time & Location

MWF 1:20–2:30 p.m. | OM 201

## Professor: Dr. Brandon Polite

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## Office Hours: MWF 2:30–3:30

office: OM 304

## Course Description

*This course is about value and the arts.*

We will focus on three main topics. The first is about **aesthetics**: What makes some works of art "bad," and why do we sometimes enjoy bad art? The second is about **culture**: What does it mean for someone to have "bad" taste, and how do we cultivate our taste? The third is about **morality**: Is it ever okay to enjoy art with morally troubling content or that was created by morally bad artists? We address these issues by considering a number of perspectives held by contemporary philosophers of art.

**By the end of the term, you should be able to**

- **Articulate** some important philosophical positions about art, value, and morality.
- **Articulate** salient objections to some important philosophical positions on those topics.
- **Defend** your own positions on significant issues in the philosophy of art.

## Course details

**Website:** Accessible via <https://classroom.google.com>

**Masks:** Masks are required in class at all times. Your mask should be at least surgical quality: e.g., KN95, KF94, & N95. Cloth and paper masks are ineffective at preventing the spread of Covid-19.

**Required Readings:** All readings are available as PDF's on Google Classroom.

**Teaching Assistant:** XXXXXXXXX won't usually join our class discussions, but she will be reading and replying to many of your prompts each week. She'll also hold regular office hours on Wednesdays from 2:30–3:30 p.m. in Post Lobby; otherwise, you can sign up for an appointment: XXX.

**Interviews:** I have interviewed some philosophers about work of theirs that relates to our class topics as part of my YouTube series, [Polite Conversations: Philosophers Discussing Art](#). These videos are assigned throughout the term (see the schedule below). Watch them at normal speed.

**Honor Code:** This course operates within the parameters set by the Honor Code. Students are encouraged to talk through all course material with one another and to function as interlocutors for one another. This extends to preparing to write your prompts and essays. However, each student is required to write their own work, to cite all sources fully, and to give explicit credit where particular formulations of claims, arguments, and examples are the product of cooperative work.

**Accommodations:** If you have academic accommodations of any sort and need particular allowances, such as a notetaker or more flexible deadlines, please let me know early on in the term so that we can make a plan to help you succeed in the course.

## Course Requirements

### Weekly Writing Prompts | 30 pts

Each week you will have the opportunity to select **one** significant quote from **one** of that week's readings or interviews, and write a **150–200 word** response to it. A quote may be chosen because it rings true or seems wrong, it is illuminating, it resonates or conflicts with another author's view, etc. Whatever the nature of your response, it must reflect your familiarity with the reading/interview as a whole. You will post your response on Google Classroom as that week's "**Writing Prompt**" assignment. There will be **eight opportunities** to submit prompts over the course of the term.

**Grading:** Prompts will be graded as **Satisfactory** or **Needs Work**. The number of satisfactory prompts needed to earn a particular grade out of 30 pts are: **6=100%**, **5=85%**, **4=70%**, **3=55%**, **2=40%**, **1=25%**.

### Replies to Prompts | 10 pts

In addition to writing prompts, you will also reply to **ten** of your classmates' prompts over the course of the term. Each reply must be at least **50 words long**, is worth **1 pt**, and will be graded solely on whether it is thoughtful, careful, and written clearly enough.

**Note:** No more than 2 replies can earn credit per week.

### Engagement | 20 pts

Engagement comes in many forms, not just attendance. It includes (but is not limited to) the following:

**Preparation:** reviewing readings & materials before class

**Focus:** avoiding distractions during in-class activities

**Presence:** engaged and responsive during in-class activities

**Asking Questions:** in class, out of class, online, offline

**Listening:** hearing what others say, & also what they're not saying

**Specificity:** referring to specific ideas from readings & discussions

**Synthesizing:** making connections between readings & discussions

### Case Studies | 40 pts

You will be tasked with writing **four** short papers of **350–450 words** (worth 10 pts each) over the course of the term: two for each half of the term. For each, you will select a case study not mentioned in any of our readings or by me in class, **summarize** it (150–200 words), and **analyze** it in terms of ideas from one of our readings (200–250 words).

## Schedule

### Week 1 | Disagreeing About Art

3/22	W	Elizabeth Cantalamessa, "Debating Bon Jovi's Cheesiness Will Enrich Your Conceptual Life"   <a href="#">link</a>
3/24	F	Interview with Elizabeth Cantalamessa   <a href="#">link</a>

### Week 2 | High & Low Culture

3/27	M	Alex King, "The Taco Bell Beef Crunchy Taco" & Interview   <a href="#">link</a>
3/29	W	Nicholas Whittaker, "Towards a Definition of Black Cinematic Horror"
3/31	F	Interview with Nicholas Whittaker   <a href="#">link</a>

### Week 3 | Appreciating Bad Art

4/3	M	John Dyck & Matt Johnson, "Appreciating Bad Art"
4/5	W	Matt Strohl, "The Good, the Bad, and the Good-Bad"
4/7	F	Interview with Matt Strohl   <a href="#">link</a>

### Grading Scale

<b>A+</b>	100 – 97.7	<b>C+</b>	79.9 – 77.7
<b>A</b>	97.6 – 93.4	<b>C</b>	77.6 – 73.4
<b>A-</b>	93.3 – 90	<b>C-</b>	73.3 – 70
<b>B+</b>	89.9 – 87.7	<b>D+</b>	69.9 – 67.7
<b>B</b>	87.6 – 83.4	<b>D</b>	67.6 – 63.4
<b>B-</b>	83.3 – 80	<b>D-</b>	63.3 – 60

Week 4   Sources of Taste		
4/10	M	Anna Christina Ribeiro, "Aesthetic Luck"
4/12	W	<b>No Class</b>
4/14	F	Aaron Meskin et al., "Mere Exposure to Bad Art"
Week 5   Further Discussion		
4/17	M	Further discussion
4/19	W	Further discussion
4/21	F	No Class   <b>Last date to turn in Case Studies 1 &amp; 2</b>
Week 6   Appreciating Immoral Art		
4/24	M	<b>Class Canceled due to illness</b>
4/26	W	A. W. Eaton, "Robust Immoralism"
4/28	F	Adriana Clavel-Vazquez, "Sugar and Spice, and Everything Nice: What Rough Heroines Tell Us about Imaginative Resistance"
Week 7   Censoring Immoral Art		
5/1	M	Interview with C. Thi Nguyen   <a href="#">link</a>
5/3	W	Daisy Dixon, "Should We Censor Art?"   <a href="#">link</a>
5/5	F	Elizabeth Scarbrough, "Burying the Dead Monuments"   <a href="#">link</a>
Week 8   Immoral Artists		
5/8	M	<b>Flunk Day   No Class</b>
5/10	W	Mary-Beth Willard, "When the Art Just Won't Separate from the Artist"
5/12	F	Erich Hatala Matthes, "Love, Trust, and Betrayal: How Should We Feel About Immoral Artists?"
Week 9   Resisting Art & Artists		
5/15	M	James Harold, "On Resisting Art"
5/17	W	Jonathan A. Neufeld, "Aesthetic Disobedience"
5/19	F	Interview with Jonathan Neufeld   <a href="#">link</a>
Week 10   Further Discussion		
5/22	M	Further discussion
5/24	W	Further discussion
5/30	Tu	<b>Last date to turn in Case Studies 3 &amp; 4 (by no later than 10 p.m.)</b>

### Late Assignments

There is enough flexibility built into the assignments & structure of the course that you shouldn't find it too difficult to turn the work in on time. But if you feel like you need additional time & would like to negotiate reasonable, extended deadlines for any assignment for any reason, get in touch with me prior to the deadline. **Communication is essential.** Late work turned in without my approval **will not be accepted** for credit.

### Weekly Writing Prompts

Due Fridays by 11:59 p.m.

### Replies to Prompts

Due Tuesdays by 11:59 a.m.

**Further information** on all assignments can be found on Google Classroom.