# Philosophy of Art, Media and Society

Lecturer: Miguel Egler (m.egler@tilburguniversity.edu)

6 ECTS

# Course Outline

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has come to play an increasingly central role in media and art. This widespread use of AI raises some challenging questions. For example, can we distinguish the artwork made by AI from any artistic way of expression? Do we need to make that distinction? How does the interaction between users and AI change our perceptions of the world and of ourselves? Who is responsible for decisions made by AI? In light of those questions we will explore the transformative character of art and media by departing from philosophical texts. We will interpret these texts during the lectures, keeping a focus on topics from the fields of online culture, media and communication studies.

The course will be divided into **three** parts.

The **first portion** will address questions in philosophy of art:

* Who is the producer and owner of an artwork?
* How should we interpret a piece of art made by non-humans?
* Is AI the best art critic?
* How does AI artwork challenge the boundary between art and morality?

In the **second portion**, we will turn to the following ethical questions:

* How can the AI used in media and art be biased and unfair?
* What precisely is wrong with discrimination?
* Who is responsible for the outcomes of decisions made by AI?

And in the **third portion**, we will investigate issues in epistemology:

* What is wrong with echo chambers?
* Who/what should we believe or trust in the era of fake news and deep-fakes?
* Do we have epistemic responsibilities on the internet?

# Learning Outcomes

After successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

**LG1** explain how widespread use of AI has transformed art production, media consumption, and society more broadly;  
**LG2** map out, contrast, and critically examine different positions in philosophical debates that are relevant to better understand the transformative role of AI in the contemporary world;  
**LG3** formulate their particular views on these relevant philosophical debates and argue for a given position;  
**LG4** put together a plan for an effective (real-world) intervention that corrects two of the dangers of the use of AI in art production, media or in social institutions.

# General Information

**Course coordinator and lecturer:**

Miguel Egler - [m.egler@tilburguniversity.edu](mailto:m.egler@tilburguniversity.edu) (Contact for information about the course in general)

**Practical Information**

In principle, the course will be taught **on** **campus.** If restrictions tighten and we have to go online, this will be announced in due time.

Students are expected to read the course material, submit the class assignments in a timely manner, and to make an exam at the end of the semester. Class attendance is **not** obligatory; however, it is **highly** recommended that you attend them regularly or watch the recordings online.

Special arrangements are available for students with certain circumstances, such as studying with disabilities, participating in competitive sports, or other extenuating circumstances. These are decided by the Examination Board in consultation with the Dean of Students (i.e., not by the lecturer or course coordinator). Please contact the Dean of Students (tentamenvoorziening@tilburguniversity.edu) as soon as possible if you have concerns or require special arrangements.

# Assessments

1. [Short assignments](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/pages/short-assignments) (10%)

* There will be 3 small assignments for you to complete throughout the course. Students who submit *all* of the 3 assignments on Canvas in a timely manner will be awarded the full 10% of the grade. Submission of less than 3 assignments will result in a reduction of 3.3% of the total grade for each missing assignment (so students who hand in 2 assignments will be awarded 6.7%, 1 assignment will be awarded 3.4%, and 0% for 0 assignments).

2. [Paper Assignment](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/assignments/77781) (1000 words) (30% total)

* The paper **should apply theories and topics discussed in the lectures** to examine cases in which the use of AI is reshaping society, culture, and/or art.
  + Example1: The popular show Bon Appétit has recently come under scrutiny for giving more opportunities to white hosts than to black and latino hosts. Bon Appétit has claimed that these decisions are based on *data (*collected from social media) showing that viewers prefer videos with white hosts. What precisely is wrong with this choice by Bon Appétit?
  + Example 2: The artist Helena Sarin says that the AI she uses to produce her work is “creative” and “surprising” in ways that go beyond her own artistic vision. Does this mean that the AI is the real artist?
  + Example 3: The AI used by Facebook and Twitter is proprietary, which means we cannot really see how it operates. What does this say about how we should form beliefs from information we get on these platforms?

 3. Final exam (written exam with open questions about all materials, 60%)

### Passing the course

You do not need to pass every assignment to pass the course. If the weighted average of all your grades is 5.5 or more, then you have passed the course.

### Resits

Students will have the opportunity for a resit of all components of the course. Resit dates and details:

* Short assignments resit: 9th of December 2022
  + The resit for the Short Assignments will consist in an assignment with 3 questions (one for each unit of the course). To get a full grade, you must answer *all*the questions.
* Short paper resit: 13th of January 2023
  + **IMPORTANT**: Students who scored *lower* than 6 on the Paper assignment may hand in a revised version of their original submission for the resit. Students who scored *higher* than 6 **must** hand in a **completely different essay** if they choose to do the resit. The grade of the resit is the final grade (even if it is lower than the grade received for the Short Paper assignment).
* Exam resit: **To be defined**
  + The resit will be very much in the style of the original exam.

### Extensions

To ask for extensions for the resit due to mitigating circumstances, please get in touch with me. Make sure to provide **proof** of your mitigating circumstances.

### Deadlines

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Assessment** | **% of final grade** | **Deadline 1st attempt** | **Deadline Resit** |
| Short Assignments | 10% | 1st: 30th of Sept. 2022;  2nd: 4th of Nov. 2022;  3rd: 2nd of Dec. 2022 | 9th of Dec. 2022 |
| Short Paper | 30% | 9th of Dec. 2022 | 13th of Jan. 2023 |
| Exam | 60% | 16th of Dec. 2022 | 20th of Jan. 2023 |

## ☵ Lectures and Readings

*30th of August — Introduction*

In this first section, we will go over the course material and have a quick chat on how to write and read philosophy papers.

**First Unit: Philosophy of Art**

*6th of September — Meaning and Interpretation of Art*

Essential: [Chapter 6 of Freeland, C. (2002). *But Is It Art?* Oxford University Press.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914674/download)

Optional: Gaut, B. (1993). Interpreting the arts: the patchwork theory. Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 51(4), 597–609.

Supplementary: Carroll, N. (1992). Art, intention, and conversation. In G. Iseminger (Eds.), Intention and Interpretation (pp. 97–131). Temple University Press.

Wollheim, R. (2017). Criticism as retrieval. In (Eds.), Aesthetics (pp. 289–293). Routledge.

Slides: https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/files/1951630/download?download\_frd=1

*13th of September — Ontology of Art*

Essential: [Ch. 4 of Irvin, S. (2015). Artworks, objects and structures. In: The Bloomsbury Companion to Aesthetics.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914672/download)

Optional: [Kelly, S. (2019). A philosopher argues that an AI can’t be an artist](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914671/download)

Supplementary: Levinson, J. (1980). What a musical work is. The Journal of Philosophy, 77(1), (pp. 5–28).

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1972747/download)

*20th of September — Evaluation of Art*

Essential: [Hume, D. (1757/1997). Of the Standard of Taste.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914673/download)

Optional: Book I, sections 1 – 7 of Kant, I. (1790/1987). Critique of Judgment. Translated by: Werner S. Pluhar. Hackett Publishing. **and** Fang, H. (2017). Using Deep Learning to Create Professional-Level Photographs. Google AI Blog. [https://ai.googleblog.com/2017/07/using-deep-learning-to-create.html (Links to an external site.)](https://ai.googleblog.com/2017/07/using-deep-learning-to-create.html)

Supplementary: Carroll, N., 'Hume's Standard of Taste', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 43, no. 2 (1984): 181-94.

Levinson, J., 'Hume's Standard of Taste: The Real Problem', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 60, no. 3 (2002): 227-38.

Wenzel, C. H. (2009). Kant's aesthetics: Overview and recent literature. Philosophy Compass, 4(3), 380-406.

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1988839/download)

*27th of September — Art and morality*

Essential: [Ch. 6 of Hicks, D. (2017). Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. Bloomsbury.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914680/download)

Optional: Stark, L., & Crawford, K. (2019). The Work of Art in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: What Artists Can Teach Us About the Ethics of Data Practice. Surveillance & Society, 17(3/4), 442-455.

Supplementary: Lillehammer, H., (2008). Values of Art and the Ethical Question. British Journal of Aesthetics, 48, no. 4. 376-94.

Chap. 5 of Savile, A., (1982). The Test of Time: An Essay in Philosophical Aesthetics. Oxford University Press.

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/2021822/download)

**Second Unit: Moral Philosophy**

*4th of October — Bias and algorithmic injustice*

Essential: [Lohr, S. (2012). The Age of Big Data.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914664/download) **and** [Barocas, S. (2014). Data mining and the discourse on discrimination. In: Data Ethics Workshop, Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining (pp. 1–4)](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914677/download). **and** [Zimmermann, A., Rosa, E. d., & Kim, H. (2020). Technology Can't Fix Algorithmic Injustice. The Boston Review.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914665/download)

Optional: Croll, A., (2012). Big Data Is Our Generation’s Civil Rights Issue, and We Don’t Know It. Solve for Interesting. [http://solveforinteresting.com/big-data-is-our-generations-civil-rights-issue-and-we-dont-know-it/ (Links to an external site.)](http://solveforinteresting.com/big-data-is-our-generations-civil-rights-issue-and-we-dont-know-it/) **and**Crawford, K., 2013. The Hidden Biases in Big Data. Harvard Business Review. [https://hbr.org/2013/04/the-hidden-biases-in-big-data (Links to an external site.)](https://hbr.org/2013/04/the-hidden-biases-in-big-data) Hardt, M. (2014). How big data is unfair. Medium. [https://medium.com/@mrtz/how-big-data-is-unfair-9aa544d739de (Links to an external site.)](https://medium.com/@mrtz/how-big-data-is-unfair-9aa544d739de)

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/2037639/download)

*11th of October — Are generalizations always bad?*

Essential: [Introduction and Chap. 3 of Schauer, F. (2003). Profiles, probabilities, and stereotypes. Harvard University Press.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914666/download)

Optional: Chaps. 5 and 7 of Schauer, F. (2003).

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/2037711/download)

*25th of October — What's wrong with discrimination?*

Essential: [Eidelson, B. (2013). Treating people as individuals. In Philosophical Foundations of Discrimination Law. Oxford University Press.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914675/download)

Optional: Lippert-Rasmussen, K. (2011). “We are all different”: statistical discrimination and the right to be treated as an individual. The Journal of ethics, 15(1-2), 47–59. **and especially** Castro, C. (2019). What's wrong with machine bias. Ergo, an Open Access Journal of Philosophy.

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/2075072/download)

*1st of November — Who has the burden of responsibility?*

Essential: [Matthias, A. (2004). The responsibility gap: ascribing responsibility for the actions of learning automata. Ethics and information technology, 6(3), 175–183.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914669/download)

Optional: Rubel, A., Pham, A., & Castro, C. (2019). Agency laundering and algorithmic decision systems. In: International Conference on Information (pp. 590–598).

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/2120783/download)

**Third Unit: Epistemology**

*8th of November — Persuasive power of the internet*

Essential: Nguyen, C. T. (2018. “Escape the Echo Chamber”, Aeon Magazine. [https://aeon.co/essays/why-its-as-hard-to-escape-an-echo-chamber-as-it-is-to-flee-a-cult (Links to an external site.)](https://aeon.co/essays/why-its-as-hard-to-escape-an-echo-chamber-as-it-is-to-flee-a-cult) **and** [Alfano, M., Carter, A., and M. Cheong (2018) “Technological Seduction and Self-Radicalization”, Journal of the American Philosophical Association, 298-322.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914678/download)

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/2112115/download)

*15th of November — Epistemic responsibilities*

Essential: [Lynch, M. and Hannah Gunn (2018). “Google Epistemology”, The Routledge Handbook of Applied Epistemology, D. Coady (ed.) Routledge: London.](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/1914670/download)

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/2112114/download)

*22nd of November — Fake news and trust*

Essential: Rini, Regina (2017). Fake News and Partisan Epistemology. Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal 27 (S2):43-64 -- [https://kiej.georgetown.edu/fake-news-partisan-epistemology/ (Links to an external site.)](https://kiej.georgetown.edu/fake-news-partisan-epistemology/)

Optional: Frost-Arnold, Karen (2014). Trustworthiness and truth: The epistemic pitfalls of internet accountability. Episteme 11 (1): 63-81.

[Slides](https://tilburguniversity.instructure.com/courses/11633/files/2147790/download)

**Review session**

*29th of November*