

**TC 302: Art, Sport, & the Meaning of Life**  
**Autumn 2012**  
**Syllabus**

Professor Tara Smith

Office: Waggener 231; office phone: 471-6777; home 374-0532; cell 507-3392

[tara@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:tara@austin.utexas.edu)

Office hours: Tues & Thurs 3:15-4:15 and by appointment

**Readings:**

1. Book available at the Coop: Susan Wolf, *Meaning in Life & Why it Matters*
2. Packet to be purchased at Speedway Copies, in Dobie Mall  
(contents indicated at end of syllabus)
3. PDF's posted to Blackboard
4. Articles available online (links included at the end of syllabus)  
You are strongly urged to download these pieces now and to print them so that you can mark them as you read & bring to class on appropriate days

**Requirements & Grading:**

1. Paper & draft – 4 pages – 15% - draft due Oct. 2; paper due Oct. 9
2. Paper & draft – 4 pages – 20% - draft due Oct. 25; paper due Oct. 30
3. Paper & draft – 6-8 pages – 25% - draft due Nov. 15; paper due Nov. 27  
NB: this draft will be graded by the professor & must then be substantially revised
4. Final exam (take-home, all essays) – 25% – due 9 am, Tuesday Dec. 11
5. Oral presentation, homework, satellite activities, thoughtful participation – 15%

**Homework:** Staged journal writing

**a-**What do you like about a favorite piece of literature? (Not necessarily your absolute, single favorite, but one of the handful of pieces you like the most.) And why do you like it as much as you do? Write 400-500 words on this. ***Installment due on Thursday Sept. 13.***

**b-** Select a favorite sport or, if you have none, a work of art in a different form (not literature) and pose and write another 400-500 words on the same question: what do you like about it? ***Installment due on Thursday Sept. 27.***

**c-**Revisit both subjects you wrote about earlier and repose the question, aiming to explore in greater depth. Write 400-600 words on further aspects that attract you to both, as well as any possible diminishment in your estimation of the two. (400-600 words total, not for each) ***Installment due on Tuesday Nov. 6. Turn in a single document that contains all three installments.***

### Satellite Activities

**Note:** Specific questions on the final exam will concern these assignments

*Student must:*

1. Visit Blanton Museum of Art on campus or Elizabet Ney Museum at 304 East 44<sup>th</sup> Street (museum is small, features sculpture of the German-born, later Austin resident Ney) <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/elisabet-ney-museum>
2. Visit Stark Center for Physical Culture & Sports located in north end zone of Royal-Memorial Stadium <http://www.starkcenter.org/>
3. Attend a theater performance in November of *Austin Shakespeare's* production of Jane Austin's *Pride & Prejudice* (we will probably attend together as a group)

This course carries the university's **Writing Flag**, which means that is intended to provide extensive and in-depth training in writing. You will complete several writing assignments and receive feedback from both the professor and your peers. Most of your course grade will be determined by the quality of your work on these assignments.

**Paper writing guidelines** will be posted to the course Blackboard Page. More extensive and very helpful guidelines for writing a philosophy paper, created by Professor James Pryor of New York University, can be found at:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

### **Nota Bene**

- Deadlines are firm; late work is penalized by lowered grades. In the event that you know in advance of a conflict with a certain date, or if an emergency arises, inform the professor in advance or as soon as possible.
- *All* assigned work must be completed and turned in in order for a student to pass the course.
- Any form of cheating or plagiarism will be severely punished, possibly resulting in an F for the course regardless of a student's performance on other course work.
- Some course materials & announcements will be sent to students via email &/or posted to Blackboard. Though neither will be frequent, students should check email daily.
- If a student misses class, it is entirely his or her responsibility to obtain notes as well as information pertaining to assignments, schedule changes, etc.
- Class sessions may not be recorded (tapes, digitally, etc.) without the professor's express permission.
- All cell phones and electronic devices (other than a computer used exclusively for taking notes on course material) must be shut off during class.
- Absences for the purpose of celebrating religious holidays are excused, though students should inform the professor of such absences in advance.
- The University provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-6441 TTY.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Course Overview**

This course will explore the meaning and value of two unusual human activities – the creation and contemplation of art and the playing and watching of sports – and aim to situate them in the larger framework of how human beings should lead their lives. What, in particular, is truly valuable in a human life? What is most valuable? And what might art or sport have to do with that?

In different forms, both art and sport have been around for millennia. In part, we will address the question: why? “It’s just a story,” after all; “it’s only a game.” Both realms are artificial and even the finest displays in each stand removed from ordinary, practical concerns. Neither offers a utilitarian service, such as baking bread or curing the sick. Yet people devote countless hours and often care passionately about a work of art or a particular team. (Think about your favorite music, or a painting that you loathe, or the OU game.) Should they?

Is interest in art or sport a matter of personal preference or taste, or does either speak to some sort of need in the human psyche? If so, what is the exact nature of this need? What is it a need *for*? Does man have non-physical needs?

People enjoy many forms of rest and less structured forms of play than those provided by art and sport. Nature offers considerable beauty and people’s lives (as well as history) offer plenty of stories to contemplate. Given this, what is it about the creation or contemplation of art or about being a spectator or player of sport that is distinctively gratifying? And what is the point of these activities? Is art valuable in order to teach lessons, for instance, to convey a moral? Is sport worthwhile as a means of building character or developing specific skills or traits, such as discipline, persistence, or teamwork, as many have claimed? Is either art or sport simply an end in itself?

What makes *anything* an end in itself? And what bestows value on anything, for that matter?

By seeking to understand the unusual kind of value that art and sport offer (along with significant similarities and differences in their value), we will be led to consider the nature of values, as such. Correspondingly, by exploring the meaning of art and the meaning of sport, we will explore the age-old question of the meaning of life. And the meaning and value of things *in* a person’s life.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Schedule**

Note: The schedule is approximate, to allow ample time for discussion, but readings should always be done in advance of class on the dates listed.  
Asterisks indicate that an assignment is due

## **Dates, Readings, Topics**

August. 30    Overview & Basics

### **Unit 1. The Value of Art**

Sept. 4, 6    Dutton (packet): Introduction, Chapter 2  
                   The appeal, role, and function of art  
                   Dutton, Chapter 3; pp. 193-202; 105-110; 121-125; 130-134  
                   The basic nature of art: criteria, boundaries. The value of fiction

- Sept. 11, 13\*\* Special Activities (explained in class)
- Sept. 18 Kafka (link online), “Eric Kandel’s Visions”  
neuro-aesthetics
- Sept. 20 Satellite Activity (explained in class, no class meeting)
- Sept. 25, 27\*\* Rand (packet): chapters 1, 2, 3  
What is art and who’s to say? what is art for?  
Art as expression of values & spiritual need

- Oct. 2\*\* *Recommended:* Erdal, “What’s the Big Idea?” (link online)  
Rand (packet): chapters 8, 11  
Peer-editing of papers during portion of class

## **Unit 2. The Value of Sport**

- Oct. 4 Boxill (packet): “The Moral Significance of Sport”  
*Recommended:* Edmundson, “Do Sports Build Character or Damage It?”  
(link online)
- Oct. 9\*\* Gumbrecht (packet): Preface & Chapter 1 (lengthy)  
Aesthetic value, moral value, & meaning in sport
- Oct. 11 Dixon, “The Ethics of Supporting Sports Teams” (link online)
- Oct. 16, 18 Guest Speaker: Dr. Steven Ungerleider, Sport Psychologist & member of  
International Olympics Committee Sport Psychology Registry
- Oct. 23 Smith, “What Are We Cheering? Sport & the Value of Valuing” (PDF)  
*Recommended:* Chabon (packet): excerpt on fandom, pp. 293-297  
Bowden (link online): “The Joy of Football”  
The value of sport for the serious fan
- Oct. 25\*\* *Recommended:* Barnes (packet): sections 4,21,31,37,65,67-70, 156  
Hornby (packet)  
Peer-editing of papers during portion of class
- Oct. 30\*\* Butcher & Schneider (packet): “Fair Play as Respect for the Game”  
Barnes (packet): section 58  
Sportsmanship
- Nov. 1 Dixon (packet): “On Sportsmanship and ‘Running Up the Score’”  
Sportsmanship & its lessons for the value of sport
- Nov. 6\*\* Kretchmer (packet): “In Defense of Winning”  
*Is it whether you win or lose, or how you play the game?*

### Unit 3. The Meaning of Life

- Nov. 13 Mill (packet): excerpt from *Utilitarianism*  
How valuable is pleasure? Does anything else matter?
- Nov. 15\*\* Wolf, Introduction (by Macedo); Chapter 1  
Meaning *in* life vs. meaning of life
- Nov. 20 Wolf, pp. 34-45; 85-91 (Comment by Arpaly); 128-132  
Why meaning matters
- Nov. 22 Thanksgiving – *Savor! Beat TCU!*
- Nov. 27\*\*, 29 Smith (packet): excerpt from *Viable Values*, pp. 83-103  
Foundations and meaning of value  
Relationship between values & meaning – within a life and of a life
- Dec. 4, 6 Catch-up and Integrating Conclusions

**Reminder:** Final exam is due Tuesday Dec. 11 at 9am  
Must be submitted both in hard copy & electronically

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Further Detail on Some of the Readings:

Packet Contents – essays, chapters, or excerpts from:

Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct*  
Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto*  
Michael Chabon, *Manhood for Amateurs*  
Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*  
Jan Boxill, “The Moral Significance of Sport”  
Nicholas Dixon, “On Sportsmanship and ‘Running Up the Score’”  
R. Scott Kretchmer, “In Defense of Winning”  
Robert Butcher & Angela Schneider, “Fair Play as Respect for the Game”  
Tara Smith, “Morality’s Roots in Life,” from *Viable Values: A Study of Life as the Root & Reward of Morality*  
John Stuart Mill, chapter 2 from *Utilitarianism*  
Adam Gopnik, “The Last of the Metrozoids”  
Simon Barnes, *The Meaning of Sport*  
Nick Hornby, *Fever Pitch*

An article in draft, PDF posted to Blackboard:

Tara Smith, “What Are We Cheering? Sport & the Value of Valuing”  
As a draft, this is not to be cited or circulated without explicit permission

Links to essays available online:

Thomas A. Bowden, "The Joy of Football: The Super Bowl Offers a Too-Rare Celebration of Goal-Achievement

<http://www.aynrand.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5380>

Mark Edmundson, "Do Sports Build Character or Damage It?"

<http://chronicle.com/article/Do-Sports-Build-Character-or/130286/>

Alexander C. Kafka, "Eric Kandel's Visions,"

<http://chronicle.com/article/Eric-Kandels-Visions/131095/>

Nicholas Dixon, "The Ethics of Supporting Sports Teams," available via UT libraries:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/doi/10.1111/1468-5930.00182/pdf>

Jennie Erdal, "What's the Big Idea?" (on truth in philosophy & truth in fiction)

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/1cc50e4c-7d81-11e1-81a5-00144feab49a.html#axzz1s15mfOCM>