

## PHL 285-Introduction to Aesthetics

**Instructor:** Dr. Dustin Stokes  
**Section:** L5101  
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### Course description

This will be an introductory course in analytic philosophy of art and aesthetics. The course will mostly focus on contemporary issues and philosophers, but will cover a few classic historical texts. We will focus on the following five general areas.

#### *Defining and identifying art*

What is art? How may we define it? Is it reasonable to attempt to define art? What theoretical benefits might one derive from such an analysis?

#### *Ontology of art*

To what general category of thing do artworks belong? Are they universals and thus, in some sense, discovered by the artist? Are they particulars? Events? Performances? What individuates artworks: merely the manifest properties of the artwork, some or all features of the process that generated the work, other contextual factors?

#### *Evaluating art*

Are there more and less appropriate ways to evaluate and judge artworks? Do artworks, as artworks, possess a distinctive kind of value? If so, is that value intrinsic or instrumental, e.g. instrumental to a pleasurable experience of some kind. Do artworks have moral and/or cognitive value, and do such values contribute to their worth as artworks?

#### *Fiction and the emotions*

What role does imagination play in our engagement with fictions? What kind of a mental state or process is the imagination? We respond emotionally to fictional characters while acknowledging that such characters are, after all, fictional. How may this be explained?

#### *Popular art*

Are things like film and rock n roll art? Should we care if they are not? Are “higher” arts somehow better or is this simply, as they say, just a matter of taste? In any case, what special aesthetic and/or artistic features do popular arts possess?

### Text

Main text: *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Ed. P. Lamarque and S. Haugom Olsen,  
London: Blackwell (2004)

Additional readings will be made available online (via blackboard)

**Assignments/Requirements:**

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| 30% Short paper 1 | <b>DUE 9 OCT (Questions assigned 1 Oct)</b>   |
| 30% Short paper 2 | <b>DUE 20 NOV (Questions assigned 12 Nov)</b> |
| 40% Final exam    | <b>DATE TBA</b>                               |

The short papers might also be thought of as take-home exams. You will be given a short list of questions, from which you will choose and respond to one. Your responses should be concise and to the point, and should be approximately 750-1250 words (approx. 3-5 pages). Papers should be double-spaced, 12 size font, and stapled. The questions will be distributed in class, and the papers are to be submitted the following week. **Papers submitted to instructor's Essay Drop Box, 5<sup>th</sup> floor Jackman Humanities Building—by 6:00 PM on due date as shown above.** (Note that the JHI building closes after 6 pm, so don't be late!)

The final exam will be comprehensive and essay-style, but like the short papers, you will have choices between questions.

**General:**

This is a writing intensive course. All of the work/examinations will be written. Your papers will be graded not only on content, but also on grammar, writing mechanics, style, etc.

All paper/exam dates are listed on this syllabus. Therefore, late work/exams are allowed only if arranged at least one week prior to the scheduled due date/exam date. Unexcused late work will not be accepted.

*If you require special test-taking or note-taking accommodations, please see me.*

**(Tentative) Reading/discussion schedule:**

(L) Lamarque and Olsen text  
(@) online reading (blackboard)

*Defining and identifying art*

10 SEPT                      General introduction  
                                    Plato, Book X from *The Republic* (@)

17 SEPT                      Tolstoy, 'What is Art?' (@)

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | B. Gaut, ‘Art’ as a Cluster Concept’ (@)  |
| 24 SEPT                                       | A. Danto, ‘The Artworld’ (L)  |
| <i>Ontology of art</i>                        |   |
| 1 OCT   | J. Margolis, ‘The Ontological Peculiarity of Art’ (L)<br>R. Wollheim, ‘Literary Works as Types’ (@)       |
| 8 OCT   | G. Currie, ‘Artworks as Action Types’ (L)<br>*SHORT PAPER 1 DUE-9 OCT.*                                   |
| <i>Evaluating art</i>                         |   |
| 15 OCT  | D. Hume, ‘On the Standard of Taste’ (@)   |
| 22 OCT  | F. Sibley, ‘Aesthetic Concepts’ (L)<br>K. Walton, ‘Categories of Art’ (L)                                 |
| 29 OCT  | M. Budd ‘Artistic Value’ (L)  |
| 5 NOV   | J. Stolnitz, ‘On the Cognitive Triviality of Art’ (L)<br>B. Gaut, ‘The Ethical Criticism of Art’ (L)      |
| <i>Fiction, imagination, and the emotions</i> |   |
| 12 NOV  | K. Walton, from <i>Mimesis as Make-Believe</i> (@)  |
| 19 NOV  | K. Walton, ‘Fearing Fictions’ (L)<br>G. Currie, ‘The Paradox of Caring’ (@)<br>*SHORT PAPER 2 DUE-20 NOV* |
| <i>Popular Art</i>                            |   |
| 26 NOV  | N. Carroll, ‘The Power of Movies’ (L)   |
| 3 DEC   | S. Davies, ‘Rock versus Classical Music’ (L)  |

### Resources:

Nearly all of the readings will be primary sources. You might find some of the following resources helpful.

-For a good introductory book on philosophy of art and aesthetics, I suggest Noel Carroll’s *Philosophy of Art* (Routledge 1999).

-For resource-style texts on aesthetics, see the *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. Gaut, B. and Lopes, D. (Routledge 2005) or the *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Levinson, J. (Oxford University Press 2003)

-For general philosophy resources, I suggest both *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1999) ed. Audi, R. and *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1994) ed. Blackburn, S. Online, try the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu/>