

PHL 285-Introduction to Aesthetics

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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	DUE 9 OCT (Questions assigned 1 Oct)
30% Short paper 2	DUE 20 NOV (Questions assigned 12 Nov)
40% Final exam	DATE TBA

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, 5th 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) R. Wollheim, ‘Literary Works as Types’ (@)
8 OCT	G. Currie, ‘Artworks as Action Types’ (L) *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) K. Walton, ‘Categories of Art’ (L)
29 OCT	M. Budd ‘Artistic Value’ (L)
5 NOV	J. Stolnitz, ‘On the Cognitive Triviality of Art’ (L) 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) G. Currie, ‘The Paradox of Caring’ (@) *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*, 2nd 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/>