

## PHL 385-Issues in Aesthetics-Concepts and evaluation of art

**Instructor:** Dr. Dustin Stokes  
**Section:** LO101; Winter Term  
Lectures: R: 12-3; UC 152  
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### Course description

This will be a course in analytic aesthetics, centred around two general questions: 1) How should art be defined or characterized? 2) How should *or* do we evaluate art?

Can we provide a definition for the concept 'art'? We begin with this question by looking at some classical attempts to define art: art as mimesis, as representation, as expression. We then quickly turn to more contemporary attempts to define art, beginning with Arthur Danto's 'The Artworld' and the contextualist and institutional theories that follow. We will also consider some "non-definitional" characterizations in the spirit of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Finally, we consider the notion of an aesthetic concept. Even if at the end of these analyses we find that art cannot be defined, the mere attempt is illuminating: the features of art which make it difficult to define are the very same features that distinguish art as an invaluable part of our lives.

The second question—regarding evaluation of art—divides into several. We begin by looking at a contemporary argument for an *aesthetic attitude* and how it purports to affect our attention to and, in turn, our evaluation of artworks. This will evoke a series of questions: Is art valued for its own sake or only instrumentally? Which concepts or categories are the appropriate ones for evaluating art? Does art have a special artistic or aesthetic value? Does art possess cognitive value? Can moral value be divorced from our appreciation and evaluation of art such that an immoral artwork could be aesthetically valuable?

### Text

Readings will be made available in a number of ways. When electronic copies are available, students may acquire papers online via UofT library e-journals. These papers will also be made available via the course blackboard website. For hard copies (i.e. where e-copies are unavailable), reserve copies are available at the UT library course reserves (9<sup>th</sup> floor), in class, and posted on my office door. In such cases, it is the student's responsibility to make a personal copy of the master copy and then promptly return the master copy. Students may also locate readings by their own means if preferred. See reading list handout for bibliographical details.

### Assignments/Requirements:

**10% Attendance/discussion/participation**  
**20% Short paper 1**  
**20% Short paper 2**  
**50% Final exam**

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. The questions will be distributed in class, and the papers are to be submitted the following week at the start of class. Your responses should be concise and to the point, and should be approximately 750-1250 words.

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 be penalized accordingly.

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

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

#### *Definitions and concepts of art*

- 10 Jan.**        *Introduction/fundamentals/history*  
Plato, excerpts from Book X of *The Republic*  
Tolstoy, 'What is Art?'
- 17 Jan.**        *Definitions and context*  
A. Danto, 'The Artworld'
- 24 Jan.**        *Context and history*  
J. Levinson, 'Defining Art Historically'  
G. Currie, 'Aliens, Too'
- 31 Jan.**        *Against definitions/alternatives*  
N. Carroll, intro. from *Theories of Art Today*, 3-15  
B. Gaut, 'Art' as a Cluster Concept  
**\*SHORT PAPER 1-Essay questions distributed**
- 7 Feb.**         *Concepts and culture*  
D. Lopes, 'Art without art'  
**\*SHORT PAPER 1 due**
- 14 Feb.**        *Aesthetic Concepts*  
F. Sibley, 'Aesthetic Concepts'  
P. Kivy, 'What Makes "Aesthetic" Terms Aesthetic?'
- 21 Feb.**        NO CLASS-READING WEEK

#### *Evaluation of art*

\*complete reading list for this course section to be distributed later

- 28 Feb.**        *Aesthetic Attitude*

J. Stolnitz, 'The Aesthetic Attitude'  
G. Dickie, 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude'

- 6 Mar.**            *Instrumental vs. intrinsic value*  
                         M. Budd, 'Artistic Value'  
                         R. Stecker, 'Artistic Value'
- 13 Mar.**            *Evaluation and context*  
                         K. Walton, 'Categories of Art'
- 20. Mar.**           *Cognitive value and art*  
                         J. Stolnitz, 'On the Cognitive Triviality of Art'  
                         **\*SHORT PAPER 2-Essay questions distributed**
- 27 Mar.**            *Cognitive value and art*  
                         D. Lopes, 'Drawing Lessons'  
                         **\*SHORT PAPER 1 due**
- 3 Apr.**             *Aesthetics and ethics*  
                         B. Gaut, 'The Ethical Criticism of Art'  
                         M. Kieran, 'Art, Imagination, and the Cultivation of Morals'
- 11 Apr.**            *Applied aesthetics: some test cases*  
                         D. Dutton, 'Artistic Crimes'

### Assignment/Exam dates

**Short paper 1: Thurs. 7 Feb. (essay questions distributed 31 Jan.)**  
**Short paper 2: Thurs. 27 Mar. (essay questions distributed 20 Mar.)**  
**Final exam: TBA**

### Resources:

All of the readings will be primary sources. Needless to say, much of this material will be challenging. 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/>