PART II PAPER 11: AESTHETICS

COURSE OUTLINE

Aesthetics can be seen as comprising two, overlapping, areas of enquiry: philosophical questions about beauty and aesthetic notions more broadly, on the one hand, and on the other, philosophical questions concerning art. One topic on this paper that falls clearly into the first category is that of aesthetic experience. In virtue of what, if anything, does an experience count as an aesthetic one?

Three broad families of questions on this paper fall into the second category. One such family of questions concerns the nature of art and ontology of art; understanding, interpretation and criticism; representation; artistic value.

A second topic is the evaluation of artworks. For certain kinds of properties, philosophers have been interested in whether they bear on an artwork’s artistic merit. Is originality a good-making feature of an artwork? Does the moral character of an artwork bear on its artistic merit?

A third topic comprises what might be called the interpretation, or understanding, of artworks. This is represented on this paper in three different kinds of question. First, a question traditionally pursued in the case of paintings and drawings: what determines what a picture pictorially represents? Is it that a painting depicts some object just in case it resembles it? Third, a question typically pursued in the case of literary and narrative arts: people often ascribe meanings, or messages, to such works. If this is ever correct, we can ask, what makes it the case that a work has a particular meaning, and not a different meaning, or none at all? Is it the intentions of the artist, or something else?

It has become increasingly common for philosophers to make use of the concept of artistic value, and to distinguish artistic value from aesthetic value. This topic examines this distinction.

The two remaining topics on this paper do not fall straightforwardly into either category. Realism and Antirealism deals with questions concerning the status of aesthetic and artistic evaluations, and hence relates to both art and aesthetic notions. Imagination and Creativity covers questions concerning the nature of these related, but distinct, phenomena, and also questions concerning the limits to what it is possible to imagine - is it possible to imagine something logically contradictory; is it possible to imagine something unethical being morally acceptable?

Students have the opportunity to address some of these topics by engaging with key works in the history of philosophy. Both Plato and Hume discuss themes in aesthetics as well as the philosophy of art. Plato is concerned in his dialogues with an analysis of beauty, with the educational value and dangers of art, and with the nature of artistic inspiration. Hume raises questions about the nature and status of aesthetic judgment, the role of the critic, and the relationship of art and morality.

Prerequisites

None

Objectives

Students taking this paper will be expected to:

1) Acquire a familiarity with some of the philosophical issues that are raised by the phenomena of beauty and art
2) Become familiar with some of the main positions that have been taken on these issues, and the arguments that have been advanced to support these positions.
3) To develop some skill in thinking and arguing clearly about these issues and positions.

Preliminary Reading


**READING LIST**

The set texts are required reading. Material marked with an asterisk* is important.

**THEMATIC**

**Useful Collections of Articles**

The following collections are particularly useful:

- CAHN, Steven, and Aaron MESKIN, eds., *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008). Referred to below as CAHN and MESKIN.
- LAMARQUE, Peter, and Stein H. OLSEN, eds., *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). Referred to below as LAMARQUE and OLSEN.

**Aesthetic Experience**


*CARROLL, Noël, 'Aesthetic Experience Revisited', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 42 (2002): 145-68. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/42.2.145](http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/42.2.145)


BELL, Clive, *Art* (New York: F. Stokes, 1913), ch. 1, sect. 1 'The aesthetic hypothesis'. Reprinted in NEILL and RIDLEY and in CAHN and MESKIN.


GINSBURG, Hannah, *The Normativity of Natures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chs. 1-5. Also available online at: [https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199547975.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199547975.001.0001)


KUKLA, Rebecca, ed., *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), esp. Parts I-II. Also available online at: [https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511498220](https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511498220)

**Realism and Anti-Realism**

(i) **Overview**


(ii) **Reading on Testimony**


(iii) **Reading on Faultless Disagreement and Relativism**


(iv) Reading on Non-Cognitivism


Imagination and Originality

(i) Imagination


(ii) Originality

*BODEN, Margaret A., Dimensions of Creativity (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), ch. 4 ‘What is creativity?’ Also available on Moodle


Art and Morality

(i) Ethicism Debate


*LAMARQUE, Peter, Fictional Points of View (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), ch. 8 ‘Tragedy and Moral Value’. Reprinted in LAMARQUE and OLSEN. Also available on Moodle


GAUT, Berys, Art, Emotion and Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially chs. 3, 7, 8, & 10. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199263219.001.0001


(ii) Imaginative Resistance


The Nature of Art and Ontology of Art

(i) Definition of Art


GOMBRICH, Ernst H., Meditations on a Hobby-Horse & Other Essays on the Theory of Art. 4th ed. (London: Phaidon, 1985), Part I, pp. 1-11 only 'Meditations on a hobby-horse or the roots of artistic form'. Also available on Moodle.


(ii) Ontology of Art


LIVINGSTON, Paisley, Art and Intention (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ch. 6 'Intention and the interpretation of art'. Also available online at http://doi.org/10.1093/199278067.003.0006
**Representation**

(i) Goodman


**Selected Writings about Goodman’s Aesthetics**

*GAIGER, Jason, Aesthetics and Painting (London: Continuum, 2008), ch. 4 ‘Resemblance and denotation’. Also available on Moodle


(ii) Wollheim

*WOLLHEIM, Richard Painting as an Art (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), ch. 1 ‘What the spectator sees’, pp. 46-79 only. Also available on Moodle


**Selected Writings about Wollheim’s Aesthetics**


*LOPES, Dominic M., Sight and Sensibility (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), ch. 1 ‘The puzzle of mimesis’. Also available online at: http://lib.mylibrary.ca/?id=119079


HOPKINS, Jim, and Anthony SAVILE, eds., Psychoanalysis, Mind, and Art (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), chs. 15 & 16 (papers by Budd and Walton).

**Artistic Value**


**SET TEXTS**

**PLATO**

PLATO, Ion, Symposium, and Republic (Books II, III, X)

**Secondary Literature**


HUME

HUME, David, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, Part I, essay 23 'Of the Standard of Taste'. Also available online at: [http://pm.nlx.com](http://pm.nlx.com)

As well as the set text, anyone might benefit from reading Hume's *Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion, On Refinement in the Arts*, and - *Of Tragedy*. These are widely available in a variety of forms e.g. reprinted in NEILL and RIDLEY.

Other relevant works by Hume include:

HUME, David, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Also available online at: [http://pm.nlx.com](http://pm.nlx.com)


If you are not familiar with any background in Hume's ethics, the shortcut is to read the essay *The Sceptic*. The longer route is to read much of *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, especially noticing the concentration on the virtues (parallel to the virtues of the critic) and the tension between uniformity and diversity, which also informs the *Standard of Taste*. The self-standing *Dialogue* at the end of the *Enquiry* is useful here.

Secondary Literature

*BLACKBURN, Simon, *How to Read Hume* (London: Granta, 2008), ch. 10 'Natural religion'.


EAGLETON, Terry, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), ch. 2 'The law of the heart: Shaftesbury, Hume, Burke'.


We welcome your suggestions for further readings that will improve and diversify our reading lists, to reflect the best recent research, and important work by members of under-represented groups. Please email your suggestions to phillib@hermes.cam.ac.uk including the relevant part and paper number. For information on how we handle your personal data when you submit a suggestion please see [https://www.information-compliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/data-protection/general-data](https://www.information-compliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/data-protection/general-data).