

Phil 361: *Philosophy of Art*
Spring 2007

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Office Hours: W, F 2:15 – 3:15 (and by appointment)

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Course Goals: In this class we will pose, and study various attempts to answer, questions about art. The attempts to answer these questions will be *philosophical* attempts. This means they employ a certain method in the attempt to answer the question. In addition to acquiring familiarity with questions about art and ways one might try to answer them, a large part of what you learn in this course will be how to practice good philosophical method. Accordingly, we will begin the course with a little background about philosophical method, and some technical training (some or all of which may be review for some of you).

Next, we will look at some questions about the general nature of art: what is it, and is it plausible to think we can give a definition of art? If so, what elements might this definition contain? If we cannot give a general definition, what *can* we say about art?

Whatever understanding of the general nature of art we come to, it seems uncontroversial that the *aesthetic* will play an important role in this understanding. So next we will turn to topics concerning the relation of the aesthetic to art, and try to gain some understanding of the general nature of the aesthetic: what exactly are aesthetic properties, how are these properties tied to natural, non-aesthetic properties, and how do aesthetic properties affect our reaction to an aesthetic object?

Lastly, we will narrow our focus, and look at questions pertaining to specific art forms. Literature and painting feature most largely in the literature, but we will also spend some time discussing music and film. In this part of the course, as the schedule permits, we will take some time to look at and discuss bits and pieces of artworks that are relevant to our readings.

Readings: As many of you know, reading philosophy is not like reading for many other disciplines. When we read a philosophical paper, while we are certainly interested in “what the author thinks”, i.e., his opinion, our main purpose will be to understand how he argues for his opinion. The greater part of the work in philosophy is not in generating opinions, but in generating careful, logical arguments in support of them. For this reason you should try to read the text more than once. Three readings is ideal (twice before the lecture and again after you hear the lecture), but I realize this may not always be practicable. As a minimum I suggest reading twice: once before the lecture and again afterward (taking notes as you read helps as well). Pay attention to the sometimes tedious argumentative details that you might overlook if you were reading for, say, a literature or history class—these will be the most important parts.

Required texts:

Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition

Edited by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen.

Blackwell Publishers (ISBN 1-4051-0582-8).

Available from Amherst Books in downtown Amherst.

Additionally, there will be a few readings I will make available online. To get these, go to:

<http://www.people.umass.edu/cox/teaching.html>

These will typically be in PDF format, so make sure you have access to an appropriate PDF reader.

Assignments and Grading:

- (i) Two short critical papers (30%; 15% each)
- (ii) In-class mid-term examination (30%)
- (iii) In-class final examination **or** term paper (30%)
- (iv) Class preparation/attendance (10%)

(i) Short critical papers: You will write two of these, one in the first half of the semester, and the other in the second half. These papers are simple philosophical exercises. In them I would like you to briefly present an argument from one of our readings, and give an objection to the argument. You should aim to do this as concisely as possible. These papers should be 1-3 pages in length. We will talk more about how to write one of these later in the semester.

(ii) In-class mid-term: The mid-term will consist of two parts. The first part, called "short-essay", will require you to rehearse specific arguments from our readings. The second part, called "long-essay", will require you to discuss a broader issue or doctrine from our readings, often asking you to piece together an author's complete view on an issue, or compare the views of multiple authors. I will give you a pool of possible exam questions to study before each test. I will try to give you these study guides about one week prior to the exam date.

(iii) In-class final/term paper: You may choose between taking an in-class final exam or writing a term paper. The exam will resemble the mid-term. Term papers should be between 5-8 pages long (relatively short for term papers) and very focused. It might be a good idea to use one of your critical papers as a basis for your term paper.

I would like you to decide whether you will take the in-class final or write a paper by the last day of class, Tuesday, May 15, and inform me of your decision.

(iv) Class preparation/attendance: The participation grade will be based on two things: (1) attendance and (2) your level of preparation for class. You will begin the semester with the full 10%. Penalties will be introduced for:

- (a) Excessive absences.
- (b) Indications that you are not prepared for class (clearly haven't done the reading, etc.)

(c) Failure on occasion to contribute to class discussion. Contribution can take the form of asking questions, or by answering questions I may ask you in class.

Academic Dishonesty: Academic dishonesty comes in two primary forms: plagiarism and cheating. Plagiarism is intentional or unintentional use of someone else's words as your own. Do not plagiarize. Cheating is any attempt to violate the rules or understood conventions pertaining to exams, quizzes, or similar assignments. Do not cheat. Academic dishonesty on any assignment will earn you a failing grade for the class. There will be no compromises. If you have any questions about academic dishonesty, ask me, or consult the student conduct code.