

Las Positas College
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Course Outline for PHIL 3

AESTHETICS: PHILOSOPHY OF ART

Effective: Fall 2008

I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

PHIL 3 — AESTHETICS: PHILOSOPHY OF ART — 3.00 units

An introduction to the philosophical analysis of art. Topics include the nature of art and beauty, the value of art, and philosophical methods of evaluating, critiquing, and drawing meaning from artistic works.

3.00 Units Lecture

Grading Methods:

Letter Grade

Discipline:

	MIN
Lecture Hours:	54.00
Total Hours:	54.00

II. NUMBER OF TIMES COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: 1

III. PREREQUISITE AND/OR ADVISORY SKILLS:

IV. MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. demonstrate an understanding of the central questions and formative figures in the philosophy of art;
2. philosophically evaluate and critique prominent aesthetic theories;
3. apply theories discussed in class to works in a variety of artistic media;
4. show connections between the field of aesthetics and other fields of inquiry such as humanities, religion, art, sociology, psychology, and the applied arts;
5. synthesize personal experience, individual research, and course information into a cogent and defensible aesthetic theory;
6. actively explain personal aesthetic positions to others in both written and spoken form;
7. work with others in a group to problem-solve philosophical problems related to aesthetics .

V. CONTENT:

- A. Definitions of art
 1. Art as idea and imitation
 2. Defining art by its expressive content
 3. The relationship of art and beauty
- B. The value of art
 1. Art for its own sake
 2. Art in relation to moral instruction and social duty
 3. Art as a quest for self-knowledge and self-expression
 4. The theory of catharsis
 5. The search for transcendence, truth, sublimity
- C. Making aesthetic judgments
 1. Artistic judgments as universal claims
 2. Artistic judgments and personal taste
 3. Artistic judgments as subjective emotional expressions
- D. Philosophical criticisms of art and art history
 1. The separation of art from truth and reality
 2. Sexism in historical and contemporary art
 3. Art as a threat to morality and social order
 4. The aesthetic problems of commercial art
 5. Artistic evaluation and cultural chauvinism
 6. Modern art and the "end of art"
- E. Philosophy of painting
 1. Methods and values of formal analysis
 2. Education, intuition and the perception of art
 3. Representationalism and abstractionism as philosophical ideas
 4. Art, intention, and denotation
- F. Philosophy of architecture and sculpture
 1. "Ornament and Crime"
 2. Functionalism and the limits of artistic expression

3. Art, space, environment and public objects
4. Deconstructive art and the postmodern predicament
- G. Philosophy of music
 1. Expressionism, emotion, and musical perception
 2. Music as representation vs. music as pure art
 3. Critiques of the commodification of modern music
- H. Philosophy of literature and performance
 1. The concept of the literary
 2. The definition of truth and the suspension of disbelief
 3. Authors as creative forces vs. authors as social product.
 4. Performative art and recorded art: ontological and experiential differences
- I. Philosophy of photography, film, and digital art
 1. Photography, objects and representation
 2. Why do photography, film, and digital media qualify as artistic endeavors?
 3. Tragedy and horror as artistic categories
 4. Interpreting the moving image
 5. Hollywood, stereotypes, and authorship of cultural ideals

VI. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

- A. **Discussion** -
- B. **Student Presentations** -
- C. Multi-media presentations & analysis
- D. **Lecture** -
- E. Brief written assignments
- F. Final analysis paper
- G. Course text readings

VII. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:

- A. Lecture
 1. "Plato: the value of beauty and the threat of art"
 2. "David Hume: good and bad aesthetic judgments in a realm of subjectivity"
- B. Group discussion
 1. Philosophically evaluate Plato's arguments for the claim that art poses a threat to society. Does this conflict with his claim that the ideas of Beauty and the Good are so closely connected?
 2. If we agree with Hume that artistic judgment is fundamentally subjective, is it possible to re-establish standards of taste by pointing to collective regularities in human judgments?
- C. Student presentations
 1. Dangerous art and a contemporary democracy: Plato's concerns in contemporary perspective.
 2. Multicultural perspectives on artistic judgments: are Hume's subjective regularities still plausible?
- D. Multi-media presentations and analysis
 1. Watch a short clip from the movie *Lord of the Rings*, followed by a discussion of the perceived links between the beautiful and the good and implications for Plato's philosophy
 2. View the documentary film, *A Girl Like Me*, followed by an evaluation of the implications of the film for Hume's concepts of taste, universality, and the role of education
- E. Course text readings
 1. Read David Hume's essay *Of the Standard of Taste* and be prepared to discuss the central issues in class.
 2. Read Plato's discussion of the artistic process as presented in his book *The Republic* and be prepared for class discussion.
- F. Brief written assignments
 1. Use your experience with a work of art as a basis to argue for or against Plato's claims that artistic censorship is necessary in a well-run state.
 2. Using your own experience of a debate over the artistic merits of a work of art, argue for or against Hume's claim that subjective domains like art can expect evaluative regularities in properly educated groups.
- G. Final analysis paper
 1. Select a work of art that is especially important for you. Discuss the formal properties of that work of art, and say why you consider it to be of value. Next, discuss 3 philosophers' explanations of aesthetic experience, and use your own analysis of the work you have selected to argue why only one of these three explanations serves best to describe the aesthetic experience.
 2. Select a work of painting, photography, music or architecture that is of value to you. Discuss the formal properties of that work of art, and say why you consider it to be of value. Looking back to the philosophical theories of painting, photography, music or architecture that we have covered, explain how two of the philosophers we have covered in class would evaluate that work. Using the work you have chosen as a reference point, form an argument for which philosopher's theory holds more interpretive validity.

VIII. EVALUATION:

A. **Methods**

1. Papers
2. Oral Presentation
3. Group Projects
4. Class Participation
5. Final Performance

B. **Frequency**

1. Group discussions will occur weekly throughout the course.
2. Student presentations will be given 1-4 times throughout the course.
3. Multi-media presentations and analyses will occur on average 3-6 times per course.
4. Brief written assignments will occur on average every other week.
5. The final analysis paper will be submitted at the end of the term.

IX. TYPICAL TEXTS:

1. Cooper, David E. *Aesthetics: The Classic Readings.*, Blackwell, 1998.
2. Goldblatt, David & Lee B. Brown. *Aesthetics: A reader in the Philosophy of the Arts.* . 2nd ed., Prentice Hall., 2005.
3. Hume, David A. *Treatise on Human Nature.*, Oxford University Press., 2000.
4. Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgment.*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
5. Kivy, Peter. *Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics.* ., Blackwell, 2004.
6. Plato. *The Republic.*, Penguin, 2004.
7. Stecker, Robert. *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: An Introduction.*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

X. OTHER MATERIALS REQUIRED OF STUDENTS:

