

**PHIL 336: AESTHETICS I (FALL 2016)**  
**INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART**

Instructor: David Collins

david.collins3@mcgill.ca

Lectures: Tuesday & Thursday, 11:35–12:55

Classroom: EDU 624

Office Hours: Tues. & Thurs., 1:30–2:30

Office: LEA 916

This course will focus on four sets of questions, corresponding to four major issues in the philosophy of art and touching on the three traditional core areas of philosophy – metaphysics, epistemology and value. We will examine and critically compare the answers to these questions that have been offered by both ‘classic’ and contemporary thinkers (philosophers, critics and artists). These sets of questions are:

1. What is the nature of art? What makes something count as a work of art? Can anything be art?
2. What is it to understand a work of art? Are there criteria by which one interpretation of a work can be judged to be more correct than another? Is correctness of interpretation a matter of being right about the meaning of a work? What role might the artist’s intentions play in determining this meaning?
3. What makes a work of art count as a *good* work of art? In virtue of what, if anything, is one work better than another? Are evaluative judgments of art ‘objective’ or universally true? Are they ‘merely subjective’, i.e. just statements of individual preference? Are they ‘culturally relative’ – and what does it mean to say this?
4. Why does art matter? What is the value of creating and engaging with art? What is the place of art in culture and society? Does art have a social function or value, and might this have negative (or ‘disvaluable’) dimensions?

**Evaluation:**

Students’ final grades will be weighted as follows:

Participation .....	15%
Three Written Assignments (4 double-spaced pages each) .....	50%
Final Exam .....	35%

To emphasize that learning is process of development and that assignments are steps on the way towards improving in one’s thinking, writing and understanding – rather than ‘one shot’ chances at a grade that is either ‘won’ or ‘lost’ – the three written assignments will be weighted at 10%, 15%, and 25%, with the highest graded of the three weighted at 25%, and the lowest graded weighted at 10%.

[NB: this differential weighting will only be applied for students who complete *all three* written assignments; students who complete only two or one will have each count for 17% of their final grade.]

There will be three written assignments, one dealing with the first of the above sets of questions, one dealing with the second set, and one dealing with the third and fourth sets. Each written assignment may take one of a variety of approaches: (1) carefully explicating an important argument from one of the readings, and offering a brief critical assessment (e.g., considering an original objection or counter-argument); (2) explaining an apparent difference of position on a particular issue in two of the readings, and either arguing for one against the other, or arguing for their compatibility; (3) stating a significant question raised, explicitly or implicitly, by one of the readings but which the reading does not itself answer, and exploring a possible answer to it; (4) where appropriate, applying a key idea from the readings to a particular artwork or artist’s practice. (Students should not take the same approach on all three assignments.)

Written assignments are to be submitted, in ‘hard copy’ when possible, by the start of class on the due date. Assignments received after the relevant deadline will incur a 1% penalty (of the final grade) per calendar day.

## **Requirements:**

While there are no specific pre-requisites for this course, it is recommended that students have taken at least one philosophy course at the university or CEGEP level, *or* have some academic or practical background in one of the arts. All students are expected to complete assigned readings on time and come to lectures prepared to engage with, pose questions about, and critically discuss ideas, issues and arguments in the readings.

## **Evaluation Criteria:**

In general, assignments and participation will be evaluated based on the degree to which students have engaged thoughtfully and deeply with the questions we are considering, in connection with the thoughts and arguments of the authors we read.

- A: excellent understanding of course material and original/independent analysis or application of ideas
- B: solid understanding of course material, but mainly summary, with little original/independent analysis
- C: basic understanding of course material, but with some significant errors (e.g., mistakes about key ideas)
- D: a basic grasp of some ideas, but a poor/incomplete understanding of the material overall
- F: work displays no real understanding of the course material

[NB: significantly unclear or improper writing will result in a reduction of at least one letter grade]

## **Course Materials:**

Readings will be available from the McGill University Bookstore (which will, by September, have changed its name to the rather un-aesthetic 'Le James' and its location to 3544 avenue du Parc). Most readings will be contained in a course pack, with the exception of readings from the following three books. The first two books will be available for purchase at the McGill Bookstore. The third book is available for free on-line; students wishing a printed copy can talk to me.

Collingwood, R. G., 1938, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford University Press, 1995 edition).

Lewis, C. S., 1961, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2012 edition).

Marcuse, H., 1978, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Beacon Press).

[available at: [www.marginalutility.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/aesthetic-dimension\\_-\\_marcuse.pdf](http://www.marginalutility.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/aesthetic-dimension_-_marcuse.pdf)]

## **Electronic Devices:**

Students in this course should refrain from using electronic devices, including laptops, during class time, if only because the use of such devices is a distraction to others. Students with *legitimate* reasons for using a laptop to take notes may do so with the instructor's approval, and with the promise to use them *only* for note-taking. Students taking notes on a laptop with permission might be requested to submit a copy of their notes after each class. Cell phones (including text messaging) should not be used in class. For more information, please see McGill's policy regarding computing and communication devices in class ([www.mcgill.ca/tls/teaching/policies](http://www.mcgill.ca/tls/teaching/policies)).

## **Accessibility:**

I hope to make this course accessible for students who may need some form of accommodation in order to engage fully with the course. If you are in need of an accommodation, please let me know *as soon as possible* so I can endeavour to accommodate your needs. In cases where the need/accommodation warrants, students should also contact the Office for Students with Disabilities ([disabilities.students@mcgill.ca](mailto:disabilities.students@mcgill.ca)) beforehand.

*McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).*

*In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.*

*In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.*

## PHIL 336 – Weekly Schedule (Fall 2016)

Sept. 6 – Introduction and Course Overview

R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, Introduction, §§1–3 (pp. 1-5)

Tom Wolfe, “The Worship of Art”

### **I: What is Art?**

Sept. 8 – Art as Imitation

Plato, *Republic*, Book 10, excerpts

Aristotle, *Poetics*, excerpts

Sept. 13 – Art as Form

Clive Bell, “The Aesthetic Hypothesis”

Roger Fry, “Art as Form”

Sept. 15 – Art as Symbol

Suzanne Langer, “The Work of Art as a Symbol”

Sept. 20 – Art as Expression I

Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, excerpts

Sept. 22 – Distinguishing Art from Craft

R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, Introduction, §§4–6 (pp. 5-11), Chapter 2 (pp. 15-41)

Sept. 27 – Art as Expression II

R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, Chapter 6 (pp. 105-124)

Sept. 29 – Art and Imagination

R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, Chapter 7 (pp. 125-153)

Oct. 4 – Institutional Theories of Art

Arthur Danto, “The Artworld”

George Dickie, “What is Art? An Institutional Analysis”

### **II: Interpreting Art**

Oct. 6 – Against Symbolism as the Model of Meaning

Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation”

Severin Schroeder, “The Coded-Message Model of Literature”

Oct. 11 – Retrieval and Re-Enactment

Richard Wollheim, “Criticism as Retrieval”

R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (pp. 247-52, pp. 308-311)

#### **First Written Assignment Due**

Oct. 13 – The Role of Authorial Intention I

William Wimsatt & Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy”

Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”

Oct. 18 – The Role of Authorial Intention II

E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*, Chapter 1: “A Defence of the Author”

Oct. 20 – Inferential Criticism

Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, Chapter 4: “Truth and Other Cultures”

### III: Evaluating Art

Oct. 25 – The Challenge of Relativism

Daniel Crowley, “Aesthetic Judgment and Cultural Relativism”

Bernard Heyl, “Relativism Again”

Monroe Beardsley, “The Refutation of Relativism”

Oct. 27 – Objectivism, Subjectivism, and Relativism I

Jerome Stolnitz, “The Meaning and Confirmation of the Value-Judgment” (pp. 388-409)

Nov. 1 – Objectivism, Subjectivism, and Relativism II

Jerome Stolnitz, “The Meaning and Confirmation of the Value-Judgment” (pp. 409-437)

#### **Second Written Assignment Due**

Nov. 3 – Aesthetic Value and ‘Satisfaction’

Hugo Meynell, *The Nature of Aesthetic Value*, excerpts

Nov. 8 – Good Art or Good Spectators? I

David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”

C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (pp. 1-39)

Nov. 10 – Good Art or Good Spectators? II

C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (pp. 74-94, pp. 104-129)

### IV: The Value of Art

Nov. 15 – Socio-Political Suspicions About Art I

Plato, *Republic*, Books 2–3, excerpts

Nov. 17 – Socio-Political Suspicions About Art II

Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Chapter 5

Nov. 22 – Socio-Political Value: Art and Critique

bell hooks, “Art on my Mind”

Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Preface, Chapters I, II & IV, Conclusion

Nov. 24 – ‘High’ vs. ‘Low’ Art

Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Modern Culture*, Chapters 8 & 9

R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (pp. 94-104, pp. 280-285, pp. 334-336)

#### **Third Written Assignment Due**

Nov. 29 – Moral and Cognitive Value I

Roger Scruton, *Culture Counts*, Chapters 1 & 3

Colin Lyas, “Art, Expression and Morality”

Dec. 1 – Moral and Cognitive Value II

C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (pp. 130-141)

Optional: Iris Murdoch, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts”

**Final Exam – Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2:00-5:00 pm, Main Gym**