

## Philosophy 339A 921: Philosophy of Art

### Art and Ethics

2011 Summer Term 1

M, W: 4:00 - 7:00

Buchanan B 315

**Instructor:** Joshua J Johnston

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**Office Hours:** M,W: 2:00 - 4:00

Despite being one of the more popular and engaging areas of research within aesthetics, the intersection of art and ethics is only lightly touched upon in most philosophy of art courses. This course, however, bucks that trend and will focus on if moral evaluation is distinct from aesthetic evaluation. In recent literature the debate between autonomists, those who think moral and aesthetic evaluation is distinct, and moralists, those who think they are interrelated, has become quite lively. This course will immerse itself in this debate and focus on such questions as: is there any value to art, and if so, what type of value is it? what are the motivations for autonomism and moralism? what role does the imagination play in our evaluation of artworks? what can we come to know from artworks, if anything? and can immoral art ever be good in so far as it is immoral? This course will offer you the theoretical foundation for thinking about censorship of art and what role morality should play in artistic practice and aesthetic experience.

#### Readings:

You need to purchase (available at UBC Bookstore):

- Gaut, Berys. [\*Art, Emotion and Ethics\*](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (paperback)

The other readings are available on the internet, through JSTOR or similar databases, or through the online-reader function of the UBC library. You'll need a VPN for off-campus access. Go [here](#) for help.

#### Work Load:

- Participation: 10%
- Announced Quizzes: 30% (10% each)
- Short Paper (600-800 words): 20%
- Research Paper (2000-2500 words): 40%

**Quizzes:** The point of the quizzes is to test comprehension of the readings and lectures and to make sure you have been keeping up with it all. The content will be a combination of very short answer, fill in the blank, True/False, multiple choice, etc.

**Papers:** The short paper will be your response to an essay question that I will pass out in advance. Here you will have the opportunity to write some philosophy: construct an argument, defend your position, respond to counterexamples, etc. **The long paper can be on a topic of your choosing, but you must email me explaining the topic beforehand.** Also see the end of the syllabus for proposed research paper topics.

Please check the course website for tips on *How to Write a Philosophy Paper*. These tips will come in handy, trust me.

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## Reading Schedule

(you are to come to class already having read the assigned material for that day)

### Topic 1: Aestheticism/Autonomism

May 9th

- i) Course Intro : '[Aesthetics and Ethics: The State of the Art.](#)' American Society of Aesthetics online (Jeffrey T. Dean)
- ii) Stolnitz, Jerome. '[On the Cognitive Triviality of Art.](#)' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32.3 (1992): 191-200.

May 11th

- i) Lamarque, Peter. '[The Uselessness of Art](#)' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68.3 (2010): 205 -14.
- ii) Posner, Richard. '[Against Ethical Criticism.](#)' *Philosophy and Literature* 21.1 (1997) 1-27.

### Topic 2: The Imagination and Emotional Engagement

May 16th

- i) Walton, Kendall. '[Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality, I](#)'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. 68 (1994): 27-51.
- ii) Tanner, Michael. 'Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality, II'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. 68 (1994): 51-66. (same link as above)

May 18th

- i) Gaut, Berys. *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Chp 9.

May 23rd NO CLASS ~ Victoria Day

### Topic 3: Moralism And Emotion

May 25th

- i) Carroll, Noël. '[Moderate Moralism](#).' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36.3 (1996): 223-37.
- ii) Anderson, James C. and Jeffrey T. Dean. '[Moderate Autonomism](#).' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38.2 (1998): 150-66.

May 30th

- i) Gaut, Berys. *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Chp 10.

### Topic 4: Moralism and Knowledge

June 1st

- ii) Carroll, Noël. 'Art, Narrative and Moral Understanding' in his *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. 270-93.

June 6th

- i) Gaut, Berys. *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Chp 7.

June 8th

- i) Gaut, Berys. *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Chp 8.

### Topic 5: Immoralism/Videogames

June 13th

- i) Kieran, Matthew. 'Forbidden Knowledge: The Challenge of Cognitive Immoralism.' *Art and Morality*. Ed. Sebastian Gardner and José Luis Bermúdez. London: Routledge, 2003. 56-73.
- ii) Kieran, Matthew. *Revealing Art*. London: Routledge, 2005. Chapter 4.

June 15th

- i) Tavinor, Grant. '[Videogames and Interactive Fiction](#).' *Philosophy and Literature* 29.1 (2005) 24-40.
- ii) Tavinor, Grant. *The Art of Videogames*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Chp. 8.

## Possible research paper topics / Ideas to get you started

1. What is the strongest argument for the claim that the moral character of a work is not relevant to its artistic value? Does artistic or literary criticism tend to concern itself with the truth or morality of works? If so, in what ways? If not, why do you think this is?
2. What different explanations might there be for difficulty with or resistance to imaginatively entering into attitudes you take to be immoral? How might this relate to the way our imaginings work as contrasted with belief? How might different literary or artistic treatments of the same subject matter make a difference?
3. How do narrative works draw on our moral concepts and responses? Can we suspend our normal moral commitments or application of moral concepts in responding emotionally to art works? Should we respond emotionally to art works as we ought to respond to real world events we witness? Why? Why not?
4. How, if at all, do art works convey moral understanding? How, if at all, is this related to the kinds of moral knowledge art works can teach or reveal to us? When, where and why might this be tied to the artistic value of a work? How can we tell where a work enhances our moral understanding as opposed to misleading or distorting it?
5. What art works do you value overall as art which commend or endorse moral values and attitudes that you do not? Is appreciation of them always marred or lessened by the morally dubious aspect? If not, what explains the differences in evaluation? What, if anything, might you learn by engaging with works which endorse moral attitudes or apply moral concepts different from those you take to be justified? How, if at all, might this connect up with what makes them valuable as art?

**Policy on Late or Missed Work:** There will be no chance to make-up a quiz if you just decided not to come to class that day. However, if you missed class for some legitimate reason, in accordance to UBC's policy on academic concession, I will let you retake it. Please refer to Arts Advising for more information: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,48,0,0>. Papers will have a 10% deduction for **each day** they are late.

Note: This syllabus may be modified at any time by the instructor.