

Paper Prompts

1. In his 2008 chapter, “Film as Art,” Carroll summarizes what he calls *the sheer physical causation argument* (*causation argument* for short). This argument has as its conclusion the surprising claim that photography (including moving photography) cannot be art. In response, Carroll objects that proponents of the causation argument commit a “modal fallacy” by moving from a conclusion about *conceivable* photographs to *actual* photographs. How should the proponent of the causation argument respond to this objection?

2. Walton (1970) argues for the falsity of the formalist thesis that the aesthetic features of an artwork are wholly determined by the formal features of that work. Instead, Walton maintains that (at least in many cases) the aesthetic features of an artwork are partly determined by certain historical factors. Analyze Walton’s argument. Does it succeed? Why or why not?

3. There are three different philosophical positions concerning the relationship between moral and aesthetic flaws. According to *autonomism*, the moral flaws of artworks are *never* aesthetic flaws in them. According to *moralism*, by contrast, artworks are *always* aesthetically *bad* (to some extent) in virtue of their moral flaws. Finally, according to *immoralism*, artworks are *sometimes* aesthetically *good* (to some extent) in virtue of their moral flaws. Choose one of these three positions and then pick a movie or literary work that appears to be most problematic for that position. Spell out your chosen position in detail and briefly explain why it is plausible. Next, explain in detail why your chosen movie or literary work is supposed to raise problems for your position and then defend your position against those alleged problems.

Background: Gaut 2001, “Art and Ethics”; <http://www.iep.utm.edu/art-eth>

4. Critically examine Laura Mulvey’s theory of *scopophilia* and the *male gaze*. How far-reaching should her theory be interpreted, and what are the implications of her theory so interpreted? Using one or two specific examples as a case study, argue for or against her theory.

Background: Mulvey 1999, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”; <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/#AesCatFemCri>

5. Explain in detail the “paradox of horror” and why it is supposed to be “paradoxical.” Next, critically evaluate a purported solution to this supposed paradox. For example, develop an original defense of your own preferred solution, or else raise objections to an extant approach and explain why such an approach is likely to fail.

Background: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcX9dur-px8>

6. Write a philosophy paper on any topic related to the philosophy of art. In order to choose this option, you must do both of the following. First, meet with me during office hours to discuss your topic and primary thesis. If I decide that your thesis is appropriate for the assignment, I will approve you to write the paper. Next, once approved, meet with your TA during office hours to discuss your topic so that he or she is fully aware of your plans for the paper.