

EXRE Colloquium

Political Philosophy and Ethics

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(Basel - St. Gallen)

Talk:

Aesthetic attention and empathy

University, Miséricorde
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17.15 h, Room MIS04 4122

Abstract

Although attention is obviously an essential property of both consciousness and perception, it has not been taken seriously in philosophical aesthetics. Considering the debates in analytical and phenomenological aesthetics – e.g. What is art?; What is beauty?; What defines aesthetic experience? – it is astonishing that so little has been written on attention in aesthetics directly and systematically. My paper strives to fill the gap by focussing on aesthetic attention itself. My aim is to define aesthetic attention more clearly and to discuss how it might be valuable to our everyday attention and in particular to our ethical attention. My first hypothesis is that in aesthetic experiences we experience something in a specific scope and different from non-aesthetic experiences. In turn, to perceive, experience, and appreciate something aesthetically – an artwork, but also a landscape, or an ordinary object – means that we attend to it differently: concentrated, within a spatiotemporal frame, and without a practical objective. Aesthetic attention does not only deploy different forms of attention, such as focused or distributed attention, but it also seems to demand a specific kind of attention. My second hypothesis is that aesthetic attention might offer a basis for the enhancement of attention in an ethical sense, for it might be also needed in empathy when we have to attend to other's individual situations.

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