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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

AESTHETICS

Edited by

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CHAPTER 18

BEAUTY

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I SHALL discuss several related issues about beauty. These are: (i) the place of beauty among other aesthetic properties; (ii) the general principle of aesthetic supervenience; (iii) the problem of aesthetic relevance; (iv) the distinction between free and dependent beauty; (v) the primacy of our appreciation of free beauty over our appreciation of dependent beauty; (vi) personal beauty as a species of beauty; (vii) the metaphysics of beauty.

1. THE NOTION OF THE AESTHETIC

In contemporary philosophy, beauty is often thought of as one among many aesthetic properties, albeit one with a special role. I think this is a useful way of thinking about beauty, so long as we don't lose sight of beauty's specialness. For our thought about beauty is indeed closely connected with our thinking in more broadly aesthetic terms. Hence let us begin by looking at the category of the aesthetic and the place of beauty within it.

Which properties are *aesthetic* properties? Beauty and ugliness would be thought to be uncontroversial examples of aesthetic properties. They are paradigm cases. But what about daintiness, dumpiness, and elegance? What about the sadness or vigour of music? What about representational properties, such as being of a cow or London Bridge? What about being mostly yellow or in C minor? What about

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art-historical properties, such as being a Cubist painting? Is there a principle at work that allows us to classify some of these as aesthetic properties and others as non-aesthetic properties?

Someone might follow that question with the following: is such a distinction, as it were, built into the world? Is it just a fact—a metaphysical fact—that some properties are aesthetic and some are not? Or is it a distinction that we should draw only if we find it *useful* to do so? That is, is it more pragmatic than natural? Then again, perhaps this is a false dilemma. For it may be that the aesthetic/non-aesthetic distinction is in some sense natural, but our main *evidence* for thinking it so is that we find it useful to mark such a distinction.

However, some have argued that the distinction is in fact not useful. There has been a debate, initiated by Frank Sibley, about whether aesthetic concepts can be distinguished from non-aesthetic concepts (Sibley 1959, 1965). Notable contributors to that debate were Ted Cohen and Peter Kivy (Cohen 1973; Kivy 1975). (This debate was about aesthetic *concepts*, but there is a similar debate about aesthetic *properties*.) Sibley thought that there was a significant distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic concepts. He thought that aesthetic concepts were those that required ‘taste’ or ‘discernment’ for their application, but that these faculties were in turn characterized in aesthetic terms. His critics pointed out that this way of distinguishing aesthetic concepts from non-aesthetic concepts led to too tight a circle. The consensus among contemporary aestheticians is that the distinction is somewhat arbitrary and hard to make out.

My own view is that Sibley can be rescued (Zangwill 2001a: chapter 2). There is a principled way of distinguishing aesthetic from non-aesthetic concepts and properties. The distinction is useful, and it marks a real difference between different kinds of concepts and properties. My strategy will be: (a) to see judgements of beauty as pre-eminent among other aesthetic concepts and properties; (b) to give a distinctive account of beauty and judgements of beauty; and (c) to locate a necessary link between judgements of beauty and the other aesthetic judgements, which does not obtain between judgements of beauty and non-aesthetic judgements.

The distinctive account of beauty is a fairly standard one. In broad brush, it is this. Beauty is the object of judgements of beauty—what Kant called ‘judgements of taste’, or what we today would call ‘judgements of aesthetic value’ or ‘judgements of aesthetic merit’. Two features are distinctive of these judgements. The first distinctive feature is that they have what Kant called ‘subjective’ grounds (Kant 1928). That is, they are made on the basis of a response of pleasure and displeasure. (This is hardly something that Kant invents. It can also be found in Plato’s *Hippias Major*, as well as in Aquinas and Hume; see also Levinson 1995.) Aesthetic judgements share this with judgements of the agreeable about food and drink.

The second distinctive feature is that these judgements lay claim to correctness. Aesthetic judgements share this with empirical judgements. Kant pulled these two distinctive features together when he said that judgements of beauty and ugliness

have ‘subjective universality’. So—beauty is something we know about through a particular kind of pleasure, a kind that licenses judgements that claim correctness. This sort of account is neutral between the view that beauty is some kind of projection of our pleasures and the view that it is a (mind-independent or mind-dependent) property of the world that we know through pleasure (see ‘Aesthetic Realism I’). But at any rate, I think that Kant was right to say that subjective universality is what is distinctive of judgements of beauty and ugliness. Looking in one direction, judgements of beauty are like judgements of the agreeableness of food and drink in being subjective, but unlike them in claiming universal validity; looking in the other direction, judgements of beauty are unlike empirical judgements in being subjective, but like them in claiming universal validity.

Let us call judgements of beauty and ugliness and aesthetic merit—and of demerit—‘verdictive’ aesthetic judgements, and let us call judgements of daintiness, dumpiness, elegance, and the like ‘substantive’ aesthetic judgements. Corresponding to these judgements are ‘verdictive’ and ‘substantive’ properties. Beauty is sometimes thought of as being a particular *kind* of aesthetic excellence, as a substantive aesthetic property. But I shall assume, in what follows, that it is not. I will assume, rather, that beauty is the *generic* sort of aesthetic excellence. (Perhaps we have a conception of substantive beauty—for example, we might say that something is elegant but not beautiful—but I shall ignore this for present purposes.)

One quite plausible principle would be that verdictive judgements are analytically linked to substantive judgements but not to physical, sensory, representational, or art-historical judgements. Such a view has its origins in Monroe Beardsley’s writings (Beardsley 1982). On such a view, to describe something as dainty, dumpy, or elegant *is* to evaluate it; and the properties of daintiness, dumpiness, or elegance thus have evaluative polarity built into them (Burton 1992). However, it is controversial whether *all* substantive aesthetic judgements are in fact analytically linked with judgements of beauty and ugliness. And it is controversial whether all substantive aesthetic properties have evaluative polarity (Levinson 2001). Of course, the *linguistic descriptions*—the *words*—may not seem to be evaluatively loaded if we consider them outside of the context of some particular ascription to some particular thing. But in the context of some particular ascription, I think it is plausible that such words always ascribe *properties* that have evaluative polarity built into them. The linguistic description at least ‘conventionally implies’ an evaluative judgement.

Perhaps we can distinguish between what we say about aesthetic *concepts* and *judgements* from what we say about aesthetic *properties*. Is there a doctrine about aesthetic properties to accompany the analytic principle about aesthetic judgements and concepts? Someone might propose that a suitable cousin of the analytic entailment principle would be the modal principle that substantive properties *determine* verdictive properties. However, that would be a mistake. For if aesthetic/non-aesthetic supervenience holds, the same is true of physical and sensory properties, and perhaps

also of representational and art-historical properties. Now, although all these properties might be *necessarily* linked to aesthetic properties, perhaps only substantive properties are *essentially* linked to verdictive properties. (See Fine 1994 on the distinction between essence and necessity.) Being beautiful is not part of *what it is* to have such and such shapes and colours, even though it might be *necessary* that those shapes and colours are beautiful. But being beautiful *is* part of what it is to be elegant. Unlike the modal principle, this principle is the true metaphysical cousin of the analytical entailment principle. Beauty and ugliness thus occupy a pre-eminent role, both in our judgements and in the properties themselves.

If there is an exclusive analytical connection between substantive and verdictive judgements, or an exclusive essential relation between substantive and verdictive properties, then the unity and integrity of the category of the aesthetic is assured.

2. AESTHETIC SUPERVENIENCE

Beauty and other aesthetic properties are not tied in any close way to art. In fact, there is a two-way independence: on the one hand, nature can have aesthetic properties; on the hand, works of art can have many kinds of properties apart from aesthetic properties. Nevertheless, in my view, in most cases, aesthetic properties play an important role in what it is for a particular work of art to be the work it is (Zangwill 2001b). It is sometimes said that there are some works of art that have no aesthetic point. Perhaps some artists are not concerned to realize beauty or other aesthetic properties. But even if this is true, it has absolutely no bearing on the issues about the nature of beauty and aesthetic properties that we are concerned with. For our topic is not the relation between aesthetic properties and works of art, but the aesthetic properties themselves, whether those of nature or art.

Clearly, many works of art do possess aesthetic properties among the other kinds of properties that they possess, and there are interesting issues about what is going on when they do, which we can explore. I shall focus on architecture and sculpture. Let us list some of the kinds of properties that buildings and sculptures possess. Buildings and sculptures possess aesthetic properties, such as beauty or ugliness, daintiness or dumpiness, dynamism, balance, or unity. Buildings and sculptures also possess physical properties, sensory properties, art-historical properties, and sometimes representational properties. What I shall consider is what exactly the relation is between the aesthetic qualities of works of architecture and sculpture and the other properties, which we can group together and call 'non-aesthetic properties'.

A fundamental principle is that aesthetic properties are *determined by* or are *dependent on* non-aesthetic properties. Things come to have aesthetic properties

because of or *in virtue of* their non-aesthetic properties. For example, a performance of a piece of music is delicate *because of* a certain arrangement of sounds, and an abstract painting is brash or beautiful *because of* a certain spatial arrangement of colours. In the philosophical jargon, aesthetic properties *supervene* on non-aesthetic properties. This means that if something has an aesthetic property then it has some non-aesthetic property that is sufficient for the aesthetic property. (The relation of dependence or supervenience is a general one. I shall not probe the exact nature of the relation, although it can be formulated in different ways (Kim 1993). The notion is important outside of aesthetics, in areas like moral philosophy and the philosophy of mind.) We owe to Frank Sibley the idea that it is essential to aesthetic properties to depend on, or be determined by, non-aesthetic properties (Sibley 1959, 1965).

I assume that this idea is uncontroversial, at least in some formulation. If philosophers argue against aesthetic dependence or supervenience on the basis of their philosophical theories, then it seems to me that it is their theories that are wrong, not the supervenience claim. For aesthetic supervenience is an entrenched principle of our ordinary 'folk aesthetics'. The idea that a thing could be beautiful or elegant but not in virtue of its other features is a bizarre one, and someone who asserted it would be urging us to radically revise a central and essential aspect of our aesthetic thought.

Once we have accepted that the supervenience relation holds, there are further questions. One kind of question is about what *explains* supervenience. This raises metaphysical issues, because those with different metaphysical views offer different explanations of supervenience. Another kind of question is about *which* non-aesthetic properties are the ones that aesthetic properties supervene on, and I turn to this in the next section.

3. AESTHETIC RELEVANCE

We might ask: which properties belong in the 'subvening' base of aesthetic properties? However, this way of asking the question is too general. For the subvening base may vary as we consider different art forms. In the case of some art forms, it is clear what the subvening base is. In the case of music and abstract painting, for example, aesthetic properties obviously depend on sensory properties arrayed in space and time. As we noted, the delicacy of a performance of a piece of music depends on a temporal arrangement of sounds, and the brashness or beauty of an abstract painting depends on a spatial arrangement of colours. However, what we ought to think is less obvious in the case of architecture and sculpture than in the case of music and abstract painting. What kinds of non-aesthetic properties are relevant to the aesthetic properties of architecture and sculpture?

Sculptures very often have *representational* properties. (By contrast, architecture is, as a rule, an abstract art, like music.) A sculpture may be *of* a nymph, or *of* a pagan god, or *of* Napoleon, and so on. A work's representational properties are of course often important to its aesthetic properties. I prefer not to class representational properties themselves as *aesthetic* properties, though to some extent this is a matter of choice—a matter of what sort of work we want the category of the 'aesthetic' to do. Although representational properties are not helpfully classified as aesthetic properties, it is not controversial that they are often aesthetically *relevant*. For example, a thing may be beautiful or elegant *as* a representation of something. (This is not particularly controversial, although it was denied by Clive Bell, 1913.)

Buildings and sculptures also have *art-historical* properties. That is, they have specific origins and they stand in relation to other works of art—and because of this fall into art-historical categories. According to some, we need to know to which art-historical categories a work belongs if we are correctly to ascribe aesthetic properties to it (Walton 1970). On this view, the aesthetic properties of a work depend on more than its 'local' non-aesthetic properties; in particular, they depend on the history of production of the work.

The issue is about the *extent* of the subvening base of aesthetic properties. 'Anti-formalists' deny that the subvening non-aesthetic properties are restricted to a thing's local properties, and say that they include historical properties. Thus, anti-formalists allow *Doppelgänger* cases: they say that two non-aesthetically intrinsically similar things can be aesthetically dissimilar (Gombrich 1959: 313; Danto 1981; Currie 1989). For example, anti-formalists say that there can be two intrinsically similar mosaics such that one is an elegant Roman mosaic and the other is a clumsy Byzantine mosaic. 'Formalists' deny that this is possible. However, it is unclear that the appeal to such cases can be used as part of an *argument* for a formalist or anti-formalist view, since what one thinks about the possibility of *Doppelgänger* cases will derive from one's antecedent attitude to formalism. It is controversial whether art-historical properties are aesthetically relevant to aesthetic properties. Some say that they are always relevant, while some say that they are never relevant. The sensible view, I think, is that they are sometimes relevant and sometimes not (Zangwill 2001a: chapters 4–6).

Buildings and sculptures possess *physical* properties. They have shape and mass. Their parts stand in certain spatial relations to one another and to their surroundings. Buildings and sculptures are composed of material substances, and because of this they also possess dispositional physical properties. For instance, buildings have a greater or lesser capacity to keep out the rain, they are more or less flammable, and so on. Many writers have thought that spatial relations play a dominant role in determining the aesthetic properties of architecture and sculpture. The spatial relations might be among the parts of the work or its spatial relations to its environment. For example, both Palladio and Le Corbusier make spatial relations central in their architecture and in their architectural writings (Rowe 1976). It is uncontroversial that spatial relations play *some* role in determining the aesthetic

properties of architectural works. However, what is controversial is the claim that this role is *pre-eminent*.

Buildings and sculptures also have *sensory* properties. Most important, of course, is colour. The surface colour of the building or sculpture derives mainly from the materials out of which it is constructed or from the paint that covers it. But we should not forget the colours that result from shadows and reflections. To a lesser extent, the sounds that can be heard in a building may also be important; and sound is usually important for kinetic sculpture. Philosophers usually categorize these sorts of sensory properties as *secondary* qualities, and they are said to differ from *primary* qualities in that they involve an essential reference to the qualitative character of the experiences of human beings. Unlike secondary qualities, primary qualities, such as shape or size, are said to be independent of the constitution of human beings. It is commonly thought that sensory qualities, such as colours, sounds, tastes, and smells, are all secondary qualities, since what it is to be—say, red, loud, sweet, or pungent—is not independent of what it is for human beings to experience something as red, loud, sweet, or pungent in normal circumstances. It is controversial whether sensory properties are always relevant in architecture and sculpture.

There is also the category of what I shall call *appearance* properties. These include visual properties, such as *looking square*. Such properties are the appearance of primary qualities. *Being* square is a physical, primary property but *looking* square is an appearance property. These properties have a lot in common with sensory properties (see Levinson 1990).

Many have been tempted to say that the aesthetic qualities of architecture and sculpture depend *only* on physical qualities, and that sensory and appearance properties drop out of the picture altogether. My view is that this is a mistake and that sensory and appearance properties are in fact of ineliminable aesthetic importance in architecture and sculpture. This debate connects with, and is an echo of, some fascinating renaissance debates about the essence of architecture (Wittkower 1971; Mitrovic 1998). On the one hand, there is a renaissance Platonist tendency in those like Palladio, and a related modernist tendency in those like Le Corbusier, to emphasize spatial relations. On the other hand, there are their opponents who think that sensory and appearance properties are crucially important (Scott 1914). Different ideologies concerning the essence of architecture may make a real difference to building practice. One side thinks of architecture as something that is presented to our intellect, while the other side thinks of it as something that is presented to our senses. This makes a difference, for example, to the design of windows that are located high up on a building and are most likely to be seen from below: is it aesthetically important that they *are* square, or merely that they *look* square? (See further Mitrovic 1998.)

These issues about architecture lie downstream from a very general issue about whether whatever has aesthetic properties must have either physical, sensory, or appearance properties. Can non-spatio-temporal abstract objects, if there are any,

possess aesthetic properties? Some say that mathematical or scientific theories can possess aesthetic properties (Kivy 1991). In the *Phaedo*, Plato held that the form of the beautiful was beautiful. Others say that the soul can be beautiful. And Eddy Zemach thinks that laws of nature can be beautiful (Zemach 1997). I am rather sceptical about these cases, and am inclined to be restrictive about the sorts of things that can possess aesthetic properties. I think that beautiful things always have sensory or appearance properties (Zangwill 2001a: chapter 8). But I am in the minority in thinking this. The consensus among contemporary aestheticians is to be more generous than I. I say something in favour of this restrictiveness at the end of the next section.

Because I hold this general view, I resist the view that architectural beauty is appreciated solely in intellectual contemplation. The view I favour is that it is a matter of relishing our perceptual experiences of sensory or appearance properties. Is beauty restricted to sights and sounds, or is there a higher beauty that we appreciate solely with our intellects, as the priestess Diotima urges in the *Symposium*? In my view, the things we contemplate intellectually may display many wonderful characteristics, but beauty is not among them. And the mental faculties, called upon in such intellectual contemplation, are not our aesthetic faculties. The same goes for our intellectual understanding of the spatial structure, history, and meaning of a building, in so far as that is not manifest to us in perceptual experience. The history of a building and its meaning may be intellectually interesting, but it may not be relevant to the building as an aesthetic object. Architectural beauty is discernible in sensory experience. Diotima's higher beauty is chimerical. There is only the lowly beauty that is manifest to our senses.

4. FREE AND DEPENDENT BEAUTY

There is a crucial distinction to be found in Kant between *free* and *dependent* beauty (Kant 1928: § 16; a possible precursor is Frances Hutcheson (1993), when he distinguishes 'absolute' from 'relative' beauty). The *dependent* beauty of a thing is the beauty that it has *as a thing with certain function*. Since something has a function only if it has a certain kind of history (Millikan 1993), a thing has dependent beauty only if it has a certain history. By contrast, the *free* beauty of a thing is independent of its function. A thing has free beauty at a time just in virtue of how it is at that time. The free beauty of a thing is independent of its history (and indeed of its future), whereas a thing's dependent beauty depends on its history in so far as that history enters into its function. In order to see a thing as having dependent beauty, one must see it as a thing of a certain kind, where that kind implies a function—whether natural or

artefactual—and we must bring knowledge of the history of the thing to bear in our experience. Since what gives something a function is external to the thing itself, it is not manifest to someone who is simply perceptually confronted with the thing.

Many of those who discuss Kant's distinction between free and dependent beauty miss the crucial teleological dimension of the distinction. They think that dependent beauty is just a matter of subsuming a thing under a *concept*. But the crucial thing is subsuming something under a *concept of its function*. (A good discussion of Kant's exploration of this notion can be found in Schaper 1983: chapter 4, and McCloskey 1987.) In my view, the distinction between free and dependent beauty is absolutely fundamental, and I think that without it there is a great deal that we cannot begin to understand in aesthetics.

Let us consider some examples. The beauty of what is called 'programme music' arises when music serves some non-musical function in a musically appropriate way, so that the function is manifest in the aesthetic face of the music. For example, music might be for dancing, marching, or shopping. It might be for accompanying a bullfight or a film. The beauty of representational paintings arises when a painting is beautiful *as* a representation of something. Poetic value lies in the aesthetically apt choice of words to express a particular sense. A speech or tract may be aesthetically powerful *as* a political statement. All these aesthetic values in art can only be understood given the notion of dependent beauty. By contrast, the beauty of a piece of what is called 'absolute music' holds just in virtue of the sounds it is composed of, and is not dependent on any purpose that the music is supposed to serve. Similarly, the beauty of an abstract painting holds just in virtue of its shapes and colours, and is not dependent on any representational purpose.

The distinction between free and dependent beauty is no less important in nature. Some natural things are beautiful only as things of some natural biological kind. Some say, for example, that it matters aesthetically that something is a sea bed rather than a beach (Hepburn 1984: 19), or a fish rather than a mammal (Carlson 2000: 89). Even so, it seems we should not lose sight of the fact that nature has considerable free beauty (Zangwill 2001a: chapter 7). Consider, for example, brightly coloured sea-cucumbers. They have a beauty that does not depend on what type of creature they are. Again, consider our judgement that an underwater polar bear moves elegantly. This judgement is arguably not hostage to its being a polar bear rather than a zoo-keeper disguised in a polar bear suit. Whatever it is, it is plausibly elegant in virtue of how it is in itself and how it moves. It is not merely elegant *qua* polar bear.

Of course, many things have *both* free and dependent beauty. For example, if we were to compile an inventory of valuable properties of paintings, we could distinguish their dependent beauties, which depend on representational properties, from their free beauties, which depend just on perceivable surface properties. But a painting can have both kinds of beauties.

In some cases, what the dependent beauties are is controversial. Is a building beautiful or elegant just *as a building*, or more narrowly *as a certain sort of building*?

Is architectural beauty relatively coarse-grained (beautiful merely *qua* building), or is it more fine-grained (beautiful *qua* building of a specific sort)? It is at least not obvious that we miss out on the beauty or elegance of buildings that are mosques or churches if we just see them as buildings, and not as mosques or churches. Is it an affront to the beauty of a building when the building changes its non-aesthetic function? (See Scruton 1979 for discussion.) If so, architectural dependent beauty is relatively fine-grained. If not, it is relatively coarse-grained.

Let us now return to the question of the alleged beauty of things that lack sensory properties. What about theories, souls, laws of nature, and Plato's forms? Now where we have a case of dependent beauty, a thing has beauty that expresses its function. But a thing can be dependently beautiful despite not in fact fulfilling that function, or even having a disposition to fulfil it. For example, a building could express strength and impregnability despite literally being neither strong nor impregnable since it actually has a flimsy fake façade that only *looks* strong and impregnable. In the case of theories and souls, the person who calls such things 'beautiful' is concerned with certain properties of those things—the *truth* of theories, and the *moral qualities* of souls—such that the ascription of beauty is not separable from their truth or moral qualities. The trouble with the so-called beauty of theories or souls is that it is too closely related to these other concerns to be a case of dependent beauty. An utterly false theory or an irredeemably bad soul, which does not even possess properties that are conducive to truth or goodness, could not be said to be beautiful. So talking of the 'beauty' of theories or souls is merely misleading hyperbole. What about the beauty of the Platonic form of the beautiful or of the laws of nature, which don't seem to be candidates for dependent beauty? I cannot see how forms and laws might be beautiful independently of the things they cause or explain—the beautiful things that participate in the form or are bound by the laws. The form of the beautiful surely could not be beautiful independently of its capacity to endow physical things with a beauty that we can perceive. And the laws of nature surely could not be beautiful even though the perceivable objects and events that they govern are all ugly. Again, in the case of forms and laws, the connection between their so-called beauty and the beauty of the things to which they are related is too close for us to be able to claim that they have an independent beauty of their own.

5. THE PRIMACY CONJECTURE

I am inclined to think that free beauty has a certain kind of *primacy* over dependent beauty, in the sense that we must be able to appreciate *free* beauty if we are to appreciate *any* beauty. The primacy claim is that, without a conception of free

beauty, no other beauty would be available to us. We can conceive of one only because we can conceive of the other. There could not be people who cared only about dependent beauty but not about free beauty. Our love of free beauty is, as it were, the ground from which our love of dependent beauty springs.

In music, the conjecture is that, if we were not able to appreciate absolute music, then we could not appreciate non-absolute or 'programme' music. Indeed, perhaps music could not serve our non-musical purposes unless it could serve our purely musical ones. Although there can be particular pieces of music that have considerable dependent musical beauty and minimal free beauty, our ability to appreciate dependent musical beauty depends on our ability to appreciate free musical beauty. In painting, the conjecture is that, if we were not able to appreciate the beauty of two-dimensional design, then we could not appreciate representational beauty. In architecture, the conjecture is that we could not appreciate the aesthetically apt embodiment of function unless we could also appreciate the beauty of purely sculptural properties of buildings. So there is a sense in which the ignorant sensibility of the tourist, with its admirably naïve wonder, is more fundamental than the educated scholarly sensibility. The scholar may know more, and the scholar may, as a consequence, appreciate deeper layers of the building's beauty. But even the scholar was once a tourist.

As always, the case of literature is complicated because it is not clear how extensive the aesthetic properties of literature are. A modest claim would be that we could not appreciate the apt sonic embodiment of content unless we could appreciate pure sonic beauty for its own sake. That is, we cannot appreciate the poetic aspect of literature unless we appreciate its purely musical aspect. But if there are aesthetic properties of literary content, which are not tied to the sonic properties of words, then the priority thesis may not hold quite generally. Perhaps stories have aesthetic properties that are independent of their manifestation in particular words, and if so, someone may well be able to appreciate the aesthetic properties of the story without being able to appreciate its particular sonic embodiment in particular words. Similarly, perhaps someone could appreciate the symbolic and narrative properties of paintings without having any sense of visual beauty. If so, the primacy thesis would not generalize across the board. On the other hand, it is not clear that the properties we appreciate in these cases are aesthetic properties (see Zangwill 2001a: chapter 8). If so, the primacy thesis would hold for literature after all. It is controversial whether symbolic and narrative properties can generate aesthetic properties by themselves: if they can, then the primacy thesis fails in those cases, but if they cannot, then it holds quite generally.

Given reasonable assumptions about the motivation of those who make works of art, the primacy thesis would imply that, if there were no freely beautiful art, it would be unlikely there would be dependently beautiful art, even though there are many works that are dependently beautiful but not freely beautiful. For example, it is unlikely that there would be a situation in which people built only dependently

beautiful buildings devoid of free beauty, or in which people painted only beautiful representations that were ugly considered as two-dimensional patterns. It is no accident that many (and perhaps most) works of art that have artistic merit in a broad sense also excel in terms of free beauty.

I am not sure how to argue for the primacy thesis, but if it is right, then we all begin by responding aesthetically to no more than what confronts our senses. Then we become more sophisticated, learning to appreciate things in the light of their histories. But sophisticates should not deny the existence and importance of the primitive aesthetic response. The foundation of our sophisticated aesthetic life is the primitive enjoyment of free beauty.

6. PERSONAL BEAUTY

The aesthetics of human beings is somewhat anomalous from the point of view of the usual division of the objects of aesthetic interest into art and nature. For human beings fit comfortably into neither category, or perhaps they lie at the intersection of both. Neither art nor nature will do as a model for thinking about the beauty of human beings.

It is noteworthy that the word ‘beauty’, as it figures most prominently *outside* the academy, denotes a personal attribute and not a quality of art or nature. Let us take ‘personal beauty’ to mean the beauty of a person’s face, body, or demeanour. If one looks up ‘beauty’ in a telephone directory, one will find few aestheticians listed there! A ‘beautician’ is more likely to be versed in manicures than metaphysics.

The various issues surrounding personal beauty must be understood in terms of Kant’s distinction between free and dependent beauty, since personal beauty is clearly dependent beauty. A person is beautiful not as abstract sculpture, but as a human being.

There is, however, a sceptical strain of thought that would reject this whole way of thinking. According to such sceptics, personal beauty is entirely a social construction, not just in the sense that there is no metaphysically real property of human beauty, but also in the sense that our responses to human beauty are entirely an artefact of social conditioning and are not at all a response to the perceptible properties of human beings. This is the consensus within the academy, where the subject of personal beauty is currently highly charged. In fact, there is a large cultural rift between what goes on inside the academy and what goes on outside. Inside the academy, there is a sceptical consensus among those who discuss the issue, while outside the academy much money and care is spent in the pursuit of something that is assumed to be very real and desirable, and such a conception of

beauty figures prominently in people’s thoughts, desires, and pleasures. Of course, it could be that the academics are right and that the common-sense, folk aesthetic theory that ordinary people hold is a delusion. But it is also possible that our common-sense aesthetics is right and the academics are wrong.

The sceptical view has been popularized by Naomi Wolff under the slogan ‘The Beauty Myth’ (Wolff 1992). The beauty myth is supposed to be a cluster of ideals of (predominantly) feminine beauty that are foisted on pliable women by the male media, and that have no natural or inevitable basis. It is true that there is *some* variation in ideals of male and female beauty across cultures and times. But the doctrine of the beauty myth goes much further than this. The doctrine of the beauty myth is that ideals of feminine beauty are *entirely* socially constructed (Wolff 1992: 12–19). Wolff has been well answered by Nancy Etcoff (1999), who argues that the beauty myth is a myth, since ideals of personal beauty are connected with evolutionary survival. While there may be some variation in conceptions of male and female beauty, the broad parameters are evolutionarily hardwired and remarkably consistent across cultures and eras. The anti-social-constructionist case on this matter is overwhelming. (But, since the beauty-myth myth is both comforting and ideologically useful, it is likely to persist.)

Etcoff further thinks that the beauty myth is harmful: as she says, ‘Beauty is not going anywhere. The idea that beauty is unimportant or a cultural construct is the real beauty myth. We have to understand beauty, or we will always be enslaved by it’ (Etcoff 1999: 242). As Etcoff exhaustively shows, personal beauty in fact plays a major factor in our lives, even if we are not consciously aware of it. Personal beauty has great power over us in virtue of the pleasure it gives us. But because of its very allure, beauty is also a source of danger. It can distract us, and it can be used to manipulate us. All the more reason to understand it, rather than deny that it exists. We can be aware of the threat that personal beauty can pose only when we realize what it is and why it holds us in its thrall. In contrast to Etcoff, Elaine Scarry (1999) thinks that beauty and justice go happily hand in hand. But Scarry is overly sanguine about this. Scarry lies at the opposite extreme from Wolff. Scarry sees the reality and value of beauty but not its dangers, whereas Wolff sees the dangers of beauty but not its reality and value. We need to see both.

A question that now comes explicitly into view is this: is there such a property as being beautiful *as a man* or being beautiful *as a woman*? That is, is some human beauty *gender-dependent beauty*? Or is the idea of gender-dependent beauty something we should give up? The distinction between male and female beauty has been part of folk aesthetics in countless cultures for thousands of years. (Even if there have been variations in the conceptions of each, the two conceptions have always been different from each other.) But folk aesthetic theory can be mistaken. Presumably both sides agree that people can be beautiful *as human beings*. The controversial question is the further one of whether there is such a property as being beautiful *as a male* or *as a female* human being. Rocks have free beauty only because

they have no functions; so someone who attributed dependent beauty to a rock would be mistaken. The critic of the idea of gendered beauty agrees that people can be beautiful as human beings but thinks that it is misguided to deploy gender categories in more fine-grained aesthetic evaluations. I mentioned before that in architecture there is an understandable position according to which buildings are beautiful only as buildings, not as mosques, railway stations, libraries, and so on. Some have argued for this from the way many buildings change their use in radical ways and are no worse for that. But I am not sure how a parallel argument would go in the gender case.

I suspect that the issue about gendered beauty turns on the general question of whether the sexes have different natural functions. (I leave open whether such a view would involve taking a stand on what is called 'gender essentialism'.) Someone who believes in gendered beauty will be someone who believes that there are differences in natural functions between the sexes, while someone who thinks there are not, will not. The two issues hang together. Someone who thinks that there are no differences in natural functions will have an androgynous conception of human beauty (as was popular in the West in the 1970s). There would be no difference between being beautiful as a man and being beautiful as a woman. On the other hand, someone who thinks that there are some functional differences between the sexes will allow that there can be some differences in respective aesthetic conceptions. Kant's notion of dependent beauty explains the debate over gendered beauty.

One other issue about personal beauty that I want to mention concerns the aesthetics of tattooing. Clearly, some tattoos have free beauty. But Kant's view (which I agree with) is that tattoos are all dependently ugly (Kant 1928: § 16). This raises murky but fascinating issues to do with the notions that we bring to bear in thinking about the human body. Those who object to tattoos on aesthetic-cum-moral grounds appeal to notions like *purity* and *defilement*; and, ironically, many of those who have tattoos and defend them operate with those very categories—they too see tattooing in such terms, despite the difference in overall verdict. (Tattooing magazines confirm this.) A purely 'liberal' approach to this issue—as with most other issues about the body—completely fails to engage with the phenomenology of those on both sides of the debate, since both those who engage in the practice as well as those who object to it think in terms that seem to have something of a religious flavour. We have next to nil in the way of an understanding of this issue. Yet the issue is clearly one about dependent beauty and ugliness. Both the objections to the practice and the point of it for its practitioners stem from a conception of the moral function of the body, and the different evaluations of the dependent aesthetic value of tattooing springs from more basic differences over the body.

I have raised issues about human beauty that analytic aestheticians do not usually discuss and that rarely figure in aesthetics textbooks and anthologies. However, I believe that they can be usefully explored, and that we should not simply abandon them to 'cultural studies'. Like the aesthetics of representational paintings and the

aesthetics of architecture, the aesthetics of human beings turns centrally on considerations of dependent beauty.

7. THREE RECENT LANDMARKS

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I have explored a number of controversial issues about the relation of beauty to other aesthetic properties, the species of beauty, and the non-aesthetic properties on which beauty supervenes. In this last section, I turn to consider the metaphysics of beauty. Is beauty real? If so, is it a mind-independent or mind-dependent property? Is beauty a projection of the human mind? I shall review three recent accounts of the nature of beauty before giving my own view.

In her book *Beauty Restored*, Mary Mothersill (1984) seeks to place beauty in its rightful place as a central object of inquiry in aesthetics. She puts forward two preliminary theses. Her 'first thesis' is that there are no laws of taste. I agree with this in spirit, although I think supervenience lands us with some harmless necessary universal generalizations. Her 'second thesis' is that aesthetic judgements are 'genuine judgements' and that some of them are true. Again, I agree with this, on most elucidations of 'genuine judgement'. Given these two preliminary theses, Mothersill goes on to give an analysis of aesthetic properties (Mothersill 1984, chapter 11). She there defines aesthetic properties as those that are shared between perceptually indistinguishable things. But the notion of perceptual indistinguishability is insufficiently spelt out, and is problematic, given that we may perceive things differently when we know about their histories. And anyway, her definition of perceptual indistinguishability (which involves only unaided ordinary perception) seems to imply that aesthetic properties cannot be possessed by distant galaxies and minute cells that we have only recently been able to perceive by means of telescopes and microscopes. Moreover, Mothersill assumes that beauty is always 'narrowly' determined by 'perceivable' properties, which makes her an extreme formalist of an objectionable sort. Lastly, she says that 'beauty is a disposition to produce pleasure in virtue of aesthetic properties' (Mothersill 1984: 349). Without the last clause, this would be a pure dispositional account, like Alan Goldman's—which I shall turn to in a moment. However, with the last clause it is not informative about the metaphysics of beauty, but only delineates a connection between pleasure, beauty, and other aesthetic properties, albeit one that has some plausibility. But it also compatible with most accounts of the metaphysics of aesthetic properties, in virtue of which things have these dispositions.

Alan Goldman argues for a non-realist view of aesthetic properties in his book *Aesthetic Value* (1995). He begins his book with a description of the relation between

aesthetic properties and aesthetic values. He thinks—rightly in my view—that aesthetic properties have an inherent evaluative polarity (Goldman 1995: 20). But he thinks he can build an argument for aesthetic non-realism on this basis. Without offering much in the way of argument, he embraces the view that an aesthetic property is a disposition to elicit responses in ideal critics in virtue of more basic properties (Goldman 1995: 21). He calls this view the ‘Humean Structure’. Given the Humean Structure, Goldman argues that ideal critics can nevertheless diverge in their responses (Goldman 1995: 30–1), and he draws the conclusion that aesthetic properties are mind-dependent and that aesthetic realism is false (pp. 36–9).

However, the Humean Structure is very far from being uncontroversial. Hume himself, who was a non-cognitivist, would arguably have had nothing to do with it. Moreover, those of a realist inclination can and should also back away from it. An aesthetic realist should deny that aesthetic properties *consist in* some dispositional relation to critics, even ideal critics. Perhaps it is true that we are disposed to respond in certain ways to aesthetic features. But we take our responses to be warranted—and we take them to be *warranted* in virtue of the aesthetic features that we experience. Even if it is true that ideal critics *necessarily* come to know a thing’s aesthetic properties (else they are not ideal), that would not be part of what being an aesthetic property *consists in* (Fine 1994). To impose the Humean Structure is to beg the question against aesthetic realism. If an ‘ideal critic’ is just someone who makes correct judgements, then the fact that there is divergence in *non*-ideal aesthetic judgements is unproblematic. And if ‘ideal critics’ are defined as those with a certain list of virtues in judgement, then there is no reason why such ideal critics should not be fallible, since, for a realist, a virtue in judgement is just a *tendency* to produce correct judgements in appropriate conditions. Again, divergence in actual judgement is unproblematic. Goldman uses a parallel argument from ideal critics against the idea of aesthetic/non-aesthetic supervenience (Goldman 1995: 39–44). Once again, the cure is to reject the ideal critic account.

In his book *Real Beauty*, Eddy Zemach (1997) resists the lure of dispositional and ideal observer theories. I think this is a virtue of his brand of aesthetic realism. Zemach is an aesthetic realist because science, he thinks, necessarily takes aesthetic considerations into account. Aesthetic properties such as elegance are crucial in evaluating scientific theories where adequacy to the data fails to give us reason to choose between competing theories. Zemach argues that, if we must appeal to aesthetic criteria in evaluating theories, then, unless that appeal is fraudulent, it must be because the theories really have aesthetic properties. I find this argument problematic on several counts. One problem follows from the general rejection of the idea that abstract objects can possess aesthetic properties. Scientific theories are presumably abstract objects. (Their beauty does not consist in the beauty of the inscriptions or sounds in which they are realized.) If so, they cannot possess aesthetic properties and talk of their ‘elegance’ is merely metaphorical. But even if we admit that scientific theories *can* in principle have aesthetic properties, the

argument only shows that *scientific theories* have aesthetic properties: it does not show that the *world* in general does. An aesthetic realist thinks that roses and paintings have aesthetic properties, not just scientific theories. Next, even if we concede that scientific theories have aesthetic properties only if the world they describe also has them, that too would fail to include roses and paintings. For it would only show that the laws the theories describe have aesthetic properties, and the entities postulated in the theories, not the commonsensical items bound by the laws, such as roses and paintings. Finally, even if the argument shows that the commonsensical items bound by the laws, such as roses and paintings, have aesthetic properties, it only shows that they have aesthetic properties of the sort that figure in the evaluation of scientific theories. But there are many other aesthetic properties that do not. Roses and painting are sometimes elegant, as are (let us concede) some scientific theories. But are theories delicate, poignant, vibrant, exuberant, vivacious, and so on? The class of aesthetic properties that Zemach’s argument covers is too restricted.

My own view is that there are good reasons to accept a realist account according to which aesthetic properties are mind-independent properties that are realized in ordinary non-aesthetic properties of things. So, for example, the beauty of a rose is realized in the specific arrangement and colours of its petals, leaves, stem, and so on. And our aesthetic judgements are true when they ascribe to things the mind-independent aesthetic properties that they do in fact have.

I mentioned before that there is an issue about what explains aesthetic supervenience. Aesthetic supervenience is essential to our conception of beauty and other aesthetic properties. Aesthetic realists explain aesthetic supervenience by saying that it follows from the nature of aesthetic properties, whereas non-realists appeal to a requirement of consistency among aesthetic judgements or responses. Non-realists have not so far advanced a plausible explanation of such a requirement. Goldman, with his mind-dependent view, is led to deny aesthetic supervenience, which I regard as a reductio of his position. That leaves realism as the only account that can explain this fundamental principle.

The only problem with realism is that among the non-aesthetic properties that aesthetic properties supervene on are *sensory* properties, like colours and sounds; and, according to many, these are not mind-independent properties of things. If sensory properties are not mind-independent, then neither are the aesthetic properties that supervene on them (Zangwill 2001a: chapter 11). If that is right, then aesthetic properties may not be mind-independent after all. Yet they are not, as on the usual response-dependent accounts of aesthetic properties, dependent on hedonic reactions, but rather on the character of human sensory experiences.

What, then, is beauty? Beauty offers us pleasure of a certain sort, one that grounds judgements that aspire to correctness. Judgements of beauty, in Kant’s terms, have ‘subjective universality’. Furthermore, beauty is a ‘supervenient property, though exactly what beauty supervenes on in different cases is controversial. Many of these

cases are illuminated by Kant's distinction between free and dependent beauty. Lastly, the dependence of beauty on non-aesthetic properties plays a pivotal role in debates over the metaphysics of beauty and other aesthetic properties.

See also: Aesthetic Realism 1; Aesthetic Realism 2; Aesthetic Experience; Aesthetics of Nature; Aesthetics of the Everyday; Aesthetics and Evolutionary Psychology; Value in Art.

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