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THE AESTHETIC

Alan Goldman

The term 'aesthetic' was first used in the eighteenth century by the philosopher Alexander Baumgarten to refer to cognition by means of the senses, sensuous knowledge. He later came to use it in reference to the perception of beauty by the senses, especially in art. Kant picked up on this use, applying the term to judgements of beauty in both art and nature. The concept has broadened once again more recently. It now qualifies not only judgements or evaluations, but properties, attitudes, experience, and pleasure or value as well, and its application is no longer restricted to beauty alone. The domain of the aesthetic remains broader than that of aesthetically pleasing art works: we can experience nature aesthetically as well, but understanding the nature of such experience and the properties it encompasses will take us a long way toward understanding how we evaluate and why we value art works. This discussion will focus primarily on aesthetic properties and experience, and on whether a special attitude is involved in the perception of such properties or generation of such experience.

The concepts of aesthetic attitude, aesthetic properties, and aesthetic experience are inter definable. One can, for example, define the attitude as what is necessary or ordinarily involved in perceiving the properties or generating the experience. Or one can define the experience as what perception of the properties generates or as what the attitude aims to produce. Or the properties can be defined as the contents of the experience or targets of the attitude. Of course, it will be more helpful to avoid this rather small circle. It can be avoided by taking one of these concepts as basic or defining one independently of the others. For the purposes of this discussion, I will avoid as far as possible defining any in terms of the others. Their inter-definability makes the order of presentation a matter of unimportant choice. I shall begin with what is probably the most contested but most widely used of the concepts in contemporary writings, that of aesthetic properties.

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Aesthetic properties

The most important early discussion is that in a well known article by Frank Sibley in 1959. While Sibley speaks mainly of the application of aesthetic terms or concepts, he sometimes shifts to more natural talk of properties. For these he initially provides not a definition, but a list that he takes ostensibly to indicate the extension of the concept. His list includes: being balanced, serene, powerful, delicate, sentimental, graceful, and garish. He assumes that, having grasped this list, we could easily extend it, showing a grasp of the general concept of an aesthetic property. And indeed it seems that we can. A formal property (like being balanced) is being loosely woven; an emotion property (like serene) is angry; an evocative property (like powerful) is poignant; a broadly evaluative formal property (like graceful) is elegant; and a second-order perceptual property (like delicate) is vibrant. If we can extend the list in such fashion and exclude other properties of art works like being predominantly red or being rectangular or lasting two hours, then it seems that we can discriminate aesthetic properties from others.

The question for the analytic philosopher then becomes what, if anything, all these properties have in common that leads us to classify them all as aesthetic and to distinguish them from other kinds of properties.

Having offered this list, Sibley's main point in the paper is that no description of works in terms of nonaesthetic properties entails any description in terms of aesthetic properties, although one offers reasons for the latter descriptions by citing nonaesthetic properties in ways that Sibley again indicates ostensively. That a painting contains pale colors and curved lines does not entail that it is graceful, although one might well point to those features of the painting to support a claim that it is graceful. According to Sibley, the reason for the lack of entailment, as well as an essential feature of aesthetic properties, is that such properties require taste on the part of the subject to pick them out, unlike properties like redness or rectangularity, which require only functioning eyesight. Persons with perfectly good vision can fail to notice that a painting is graceful or delicate, when they cannot fail to notice its predominantly light green color or curved lines. Sibley attributes their shortcoming to lack of taste (but not in the ordinary sense in which people's tastes, their evaluations or aesthetic values, can be said to differ).

His article prompted several skeptical responses, the most thorough from Ted Cohen (1973). Cohen pointed out first that Sibley's definition of aesthetic properties, as requiring taste to be correctly ascribed, already implies that there cannot be sufficient conditions in nonaesthetic properties. Any further argument is superfluous; the position is established by definitional fiat alone. He then argues that we do not in fact require taste in order to apply aesthetic terms correctly. Anyone can distinguish a clear case of a graceful line from its opposite

or a somber melody from a cheerful one. Finally, he questions the entire distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic properties, mainly by producing a set of terms such as 'daring,' 'powerful,' 'pompos,' 'linear,' 'restful,' which we would hesitate to assign unequivocally to either category.

This point is not decisive, though. It shows only that many terms can pick out either aesthetic or nonaesthetic properties, depending on their context of application and on the objects to which they are applied. This no more calls the category of aesthetic properties into question than the fact that the term 'interest' can refer to a noneconomic object as well as an economic object shows that there are no economic objects, or that economics is not a well demarcated field. 'Powerful,' when applied to a locomotive, generally refers to a nonaesthetic property; when applied to Beethoven's Third or Mahler's Fifth Symphony, it refers to an aesthetic property. 'Pompous,' when applied to an English professor, generally denotes a nonaesthetic property; when applied to a film by Ken Russell, it denotes an aesthetic property. Similarly for 'daring,' when ascribed to a soldier or an *avant-garde* play; for 'linear,' when applied to an equation or an abstract painting; or 'restful,' when ascribed to a nap or an *adagio* movement of a chamber piece. That our intuitions are clear in such cases is significant; that the terms can be applied to both sorts of properties is not.

Indeed, Cohen himself accepts that the term 'aesthetic' is meaningful, that it has legitimate uses, and it therefore seems that he must also accept that its use makes some meaningful distinction between what is aesthetic and what is not. If this is not a distinction between types of properties, then one would like to know what sort of distinction it is. How, for example, could we distinguish between objects without distinguishing their properties? Cohen claims that the distinction, even if accepted, is not useful for any theory about art or any description of the ways we appreciate it. But the proper characterization of the nature of aesthetic properties is important for a theory of aesthetic evaluation, if, for example, this characterization appeals to an irreducible component of subjective taste in some sense. Cohen can, of course, deny that we value art for aesthetic reasons, but it would take much more argument to erase the implausibility of that claim. The distinction is also useful in a quite mundane way for distinguishing ways of apprehending and appreciating art works. Appreciating the aesthetic qualities of a painting is quite different from noting its intrinsic physical properties (which might be relevant if the painting had to be moved, hung, framed, or restored) or its economic properties (its cost or value on the market, for example).

In regard to Cohen's first point, it does not matter if Sibley's denial of sufficient conditions lacks a supporting argument, if what he is offering is not so much a contested conclusion as a description or clarification of the ways these terms are

used or of the nature of these properties. Examples such as the painting with pale colors and curved lines illustrate the absence of entailment without further argument. Cohen is nevertheless perfectly correct to attack Sibley's appeal to taste in his definition of aesthetic properties. It smacks entirely too much of the discredited appeal to a special faculty of moral intuition used to intuit strange, 'unnatural' moral properties. Aesthetic properties would be just as strange if they required some special faculty beyond our ordinary senses to intuit or apprehend them.

Even here, however, there is more than one grain of truth in Sibley's characterization of aesthetic properties. It is true that many of these properties require some training of the subject before they can be apprehended in various art works. We cannot hear the gracefulness in a certain transition passage or modulation in a Haydn quartet without some prior exposure to music in that style. It is also true that taste (in the usual sense in which people have different tastes, that is, they differ in their evaluations of art works) affects which of these properties are perceived and ascribed to various works. What is poignant to one critic is maudlin to another; what is vibrant or powerful to one is raucous, strident, or grating to another. These disagreements can and do occur even among the most knowledgeable critics. They do not imply that ascriptions of aesthetic properties cannot be mistaken, if one is not knowledgeable or is inattentive, for example. The limits of such faultless disagreements, the fact that one critic might find maudlin, but not cheerful, what another finds poignant, indicates that these properties have an objective component. But the disagreements themselves indicate that they also involve a response on the part of the subject, that they are indeed relational properties, and that their ascription must be relativized to competent or ideal critics who share taste in the usual sense. Thus, aesthetic properties are to be analyzed in terms of the shared responses of competent subjects with particular tastes to the intrinsic (usually formal) properties of objects (Goldman 1995).

There are, of course, other relational properties of this sort. We therefore require further distinguishing marks of aesthetic properties. In further characterizing and distinguishing aesthetic properties, Monroe Beardsley (1981) seems to be on the mark when he claims that they are those which directly contribute to the evaluations and values of art works. Since he then characterizes aesthetic value in terms of the production of aesthetic experience, it is clear that, if we follow him here, we have reached the limit in defining aesthetic properties independently of appeal to aesthetic experience. If appeal to value and experience is ineliminable here, that would explain again why aesthetic properties are not only relational, but relative. Since subjects have different experiences of the same works and differ in their evaluations, non-aesthetic base properties must generate different aesthetic properties in relation to these subjects.

Why perception of these properties is of positive or negative value is itself an important question. Some, like gracefulness or gratingsness, can produce pleasure or displeasure (involve a positive or negative response) when perceived in themselves. Others generate value only when combined through the interactions and relations among formal base properties in the overall experience of works. Even those that generally involve positive or negative responses on their own do not always do so; all can depend on the broader context. This, together with the fact that the same base properties can produce different aesthetic properties relative to different observers, means that there cannot be principles linking the former properties to the latter; hence there are no principles for constructing successful art works. Not only are there no sufficient conditions for aesthetic properties in nonaesthetic properties, but the former do not even supervene on the latter. The same objective properties produce different responses or experiences, hence different aesthetic properties for different observers. This claim just is the negation of supervenience. To understand further the nature of aesthetic properties and their contribution to aesthetic value we must turn, then, to the nature of aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic experience

Kant focused on aesthetic judgements of beauty and not explicitly on aesthetic experience (Kant 1987). But his account of the grounds of such judgements as lying in the pleasure derived from the free play and felt harmony of the imagination and understanding suggested, first, that experience, the experience of pleasure and subjective harmony in the presence of an object, is central to proper aesthetic judgement. It implied, second, that the key to such experience lies in the mutually compatible functioning of our human faculties. The emphasis on experience is reinforced by Kant's claim that no argument or appeal to principles can convince us that an object is beautiful without our perceiving the object first-hand. Although Kant emphasized the felt harmony of our cognitive powers in perceiving the object, in light of modern art's emphasis on expressiveness, we might want to add to this the exercise of our affective capacities, our emotional faculty. The hallmark of such aesthetic experience then becomes the full exercise of all our sensory, cognitive, and affective capacities in the appreciation of works of art.

The focus on experience becomes natural, even inevitable, once it is recognized that beauty and other aesthetic qualities are not simply intrinsic properties of objects themselves, but essentially involve responses on the part of perceiving, cognizing, and feeling subjects. This becomes the central topic in later aesthetic theories and the exclusive focus of Dewey's aesthetics. Dewey (1958) attributes two main characteristics to aesthetic experience, which according to him occurs

complete experience, we would not describe the experience of good art works in this way, since such experience typically draws on earlier encounters with similar works and reverberates in memory, coloring later encounters with art works and other objects. According to Zemach, the experience of a work is its effects on us, and there is no effect common to even great works: some arouse us and some have a calming effect; some cheer us up and others depress, and so on. Dewey and Beardsley characterize aesthetic experience in only positive terms, but Zemach points out that we experience negative aesthetic properties as well – ugliness, dreariness and so on – so their characterization is both too narrow and has the wrong logical priority between aesthetic experience and aesthetic properties. We must analyze the former in terms of the latter, and not the reverse.

Let us once more mediate this debate over the centrality of aesthetic experience. First, Beardsley appears to make perfectly good sense of the notion of a unified or complete experience. He unpacks the notion in terms of expectations that are raised by works being later fulfilled. The final cadences of most tonal symphonic movements provide clear examples. There is no problem of intelligibility here; nor do Zemach's remarks about prior experience and later effects affect this characterization. But two questions remain. First, if such experience results only from unified works, we might question the point of evaluating according to the property of the experience instead of directly in terms of the property of the work. Second, in contemporary art and music especially, there are many intentionally disunified works that may be better, or at least not worse, on that score. Even in modern tonal music, the sprawling symphonies of Mahler are plausibly judged better, and better for their disunity, than many more tightly classical works.

Regarding the duplication of properties in works and experiences of them, we have seen that there is nevertheless independent reason to focus on the aesthetic experience. Although unity may in some sense exist in a work and the experience of it, the main reason for drawing the distinction lies in the frequent difference between properties of experience caused by objective properties, and objective properties themselves. The movement from the dominant to the tonic chord in tonal music is typically experienced as expectation or tension, and its satisfaction or resolution. Although the tension is not literally in the tones but in our response to them, even a formal description of the work must note the tension. It is precisely our inability completely to distinguish the formal from the expressive in experience that indicates the extent of our engagement by such works. In painting too, objective properties of works may have effects in experience that not only do not duplicate them, but are surprising in relation to them. The rather simple, large, and blurred rectangles in Rothko paintings are experienced as complex, ambiguous spaces

not only in appreciating works of art, but also in relation to nature and in daily life. The first is unity and completeness, which together make otherwise amorphous experience into an experience: "that which distinguishes an experience as aesthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close" (Dewey 1958: 56). This characterization is reminiscent of Aristotle's account of good form in tragedy as the feeling of necessity (yet surprise) for each element as experienced, with the inability to subtract any without detriment to the whole. Dewey transfers this felt unity or sense of belonging from the object to the experience of it. The second characteristic attributed by Dewey to aesthetic experience harkens more back to Kant's account in terms of the fulfilling engagement of our faculties: "Hand and eye, when the experience is esthetic, are but instruments through which the entire live creature, moved and active throughout, operates" (ibid.: 1958: 50).

As has been noted, the focus of Beardsley's theory too is aesthetic experience, and he adopts with only minor modifications and additions Dewey's characterization (Beardsley 1981). First, he notes that aesthetic experience is controlled by the phenomenal object on which attention is fixed. He emphasizes that the object is phenomenal, that we are focused on the way the object appears to us, that there is an intimate connection here between subject and object. This is close to the point that aesthetic properties are relational, emergent in the experience of observers as they react to the objective formal properties of works. Most important for Beardsley, as for Dewey, is that aesthetic experience is unified or coherent, and complete. He analyzes coherence in terms of continuity of development, and completeness in terms of expectations being resolved or satisfied by later developments. Finally, he describes aesthetic experience as intense or concentrated. What this means is not perfectly clear: in part it consists in the exclusion of extraneous noise or distraction. But it might also suggest a secondary theme that was traced from Kant through Dewey: the full engagement of all our mental capacities, which would generate a felt intensity to experience.

Skeptical attacks against these accounts of aesthetic experience have been launched explicitly by George Dickie and Eddy Zemach. Dickie (1965) questions whether experience can be complete or unified as can a work of art, and whether coherence in experience is any criterion for evaluation at all. Ordinarily we do not speak of experience as unified or complete, and Dickie holds that to do so is simply to confuse perception with its object. Seeing or hearing a unified work does not entail having a unified seeing or hearing. We do sometimes speak of coherent experience, but almost all experience is coherent in this sense except that of an insane person, or perhaps a dreamer, and so coherent experience affords no criterion of value. Zemach (1997) adds that, even if we can make sense of the notion of a

Aesthetic attitude

From the eighteenth century to the present a debate continues over whether a special attitude is involved in perceiving aesthetic objects or aesthetic properties. Originally this attitude was thought to be necessary for proper aesthetic judgement or evaluation, but later the focus shifted to what is necessary for producing aesthetic experience. From the beginning the hallmark of the aesthetic attitude was held to be disinterest. This notion has been defined variously. Its usual meaning outside aesthetics – a lack of bias or an impartiality in judges or mediators of disputes – has little application to aesthetic judgement, and even less to aesthetic experience. The common denotation in aesthetics is a lack of interest in the practical uses of the aesthetic object. We are to attend to the object as an object of contemplation only, to its phenomenal properties simply for the sake of perceiving them. We are to savor the perceptual experience for its own sake, instead of seeking to put it to further use in our practical affairs.

Kant (1987) captured this idea by saying that, for the purpose of aesthetic judgement, we are not interested in the existence of the object (but only in its appearance). We have no interest in the object itself, as opposed to the way it appears, again no interest in its use beyond that of contemplation. Although this would be a misinterpretation of Kant, the notion of contemplation might suggest passivity on the part of the subject, passively taking in the object as it presents itself to our gaze. This would certainly misrepresent the very active perception involved in aesthetic appreciation: anticipation and reconstruction in experience of musical developments, of formal patterns in visual art, or of narrative structure in literature.

In the twentieth century, Jerome Stolnitz (1960) emphasized this active aspect of the aesthetic attitude. According to him, one's attitude always actively guides perception according to one's purposes. In our normal practical attitude we perceive what is relevant to our purposes beyond the perception itself. Aesthetic perception, by contrast, is once more disinterested. It aims at the enjoyment of the experience itself, grasping its object in isolation from other things, instead of classifying or judging it. To the notion of disinterest, Edward Bullough (1912) adds that of emotional detachment. To appreciate a tragic play properly, we must be sufficiently detached not to be tempted to interfere in the action ongoing on stage; to appreciate a storm at sea aesthetically, we must be detached from the fear that prompts precautionary action.

Bullough's characterization of the aesthetic attitude is the easiest to attack. When we cry at a tragedy, jump in fear at a horror movie, or lose ourselves in the plot of a complex novel, we cannot be said to be detached, although we may be appreciating the aesthetic qualities of these works to the fullest. Lack of emotional involvement is not the reason we do not interfere in the action of the

that can have a perceptually frustrating yet at the same time calming effect. In light of such relations between objective properties of works and the aesthetic experience they help to cause, there is good reason for emphasizing the distinction and focusing on the latter as the basis for aesthetic evaluation.

Dewey's and Beardsley's characterization of aesthetic experience in only positive terms fits with much common linguistic practice. 'Aesthetic', like 'work of art', is often used as an honorific or positively evaluative term. Since art works are typically designed to provide rewarding experience, it makes sense at least in some contexts to reserve the term for objects that succeed in fulfilling this intention. And since the term 'aesthetic' is applied primarily (but not exclusively) in the context of appreciating art works, it is natural to apply the term to experience that is rewarding in the way that art works are intended to be rewarding. Zemann is nevertheless also correct in saying that we think of aesthetic properties as those which contribute to the positive or negative values of art works.

Some criticism of Dewey's and Beardsley's positive characterization of aesthetic experience was accepted in this argument: not all such experience is aptly described as unified or complete. Dewey and Beardsley would have done better to focus on the other aspect of their description, which derived more directly from Kant's implicit characterization of aesthetic experience: the full engagement of our mental (perceptual, cognitive, affective) capacities and the felt intensity of the experience that results. All great art works, whether they are uplifting or depressing, arousing or calming, engage us in this way, and the value to be derived from such experience is afforded by all the various forms of art, which may nevertheless vary in the degree of their expressiveness, cognitive meaningfulness, perceptual challenge, and so on. Not only does perceptual experience of art works integrate the senses – for example, paintings appear to have tactile qualities, musical tones are described as bright or dark, light or ponderous – but we perceive in them expressive qualities and symbolic meanings as well as ordinary perceptual qualities. The full engagement of our subjective capacities correlates with focus on representational, expressive, symbolic, and higher order formal properties, as these interact and emerge from more basic sensory and formal properties. When we perceive aesthetically objects other than art works (such as the natural environment), we once more use multiple senses and attend completely not only to sensuous and formal properties, but to the natural objects or scenes as expressive, as uplifting or oppressive, majestic or delicate.

While the purpose of art may not be pleasure in the narrow sense, it is the enjoyment, refreshment, and enlightenment that such full experience provides. Great art challenges our intellects as well as our perceptual and emotional capacities. To meet all these challenges simultaneously is to experience aesthetically.

Despite these criticisms, there are once again grains of truth in the traditional account of the aesthetic attitude. It remains the case that ordinary perception is absorbed in and functions in the service of practical action, which normally prompts attention only to aspects of objects insufficient for aesthetic appreciation of them. Nor is it the case that paying close attention to art works or other objects is all that is involved in appreciating them aesthetically. Scientists pay close attention to their experimental data, investors to stock transactions, and baseball batters to pitches coming at them, but none of these contexts ordinarily involve aesthetic appreciation. As noted earlier, the aesthetic properties to which one pays attention are not simply objective properties of works, but relational properties partly constituted by one's responses when fully engaged by the aesthetic object. To be fully engaged is not simply to pay close perceptual attention to formal detail and complex internal relations in the object's structure, but also to bring to bear one's cognitive grasp of those external and historical relations that inform one's aesthetic experience, and to be receptive to the expressive qualities that emerge through this interaction. Knowledge that *can* inform one's experience of a work includes that of the artist's intentions, techniques, attitudes, problems overcome, and so on. Such knowledge is aesthetically relevant only when it *does* inform one's experience of the work.

Such engagement is ordinarily at least partly voluntary, and this is the truth behind the aesthetic attitude theorist's claim that we can adopt or fail to adopt the attitude toward any object, and that whether or not we adopt it affects how we experience the object. Not every object invites or rewards an attempt at aesthetic appreciation, however. Thus the attempt to adopt an aesthetic attitude, or the desire to be fully engaged by an object, is not sufficient to guarantee its own success, to produce aesthetic experience. Nor is it necessary: sometimes we are simply struck by the aesthetic qualities of an art work or natural scene (although engagement is a matter of degree, and full appreciation of an art work usually demands more cognitive preparation than this image of being 'struck' suggests).

When we are so fully engaged in appreciating a work, we often have the illusion of entering another world. We lose ourselves in the aesthetic experience, in the world of the work. This is the truth behind the claim that the aesthetic attitude removes or detaches us from the world of our practical affairs. It is not that we are detached from the aesthetic object in appreciating it: very much the reverse is the case. Nor is it that we are not interested in its existence or relations to other objects, as these relations can affect the object's appearance or our experience of it. But removal from our usual practical affairs is both a typical cause (darkened theaters, quiet museums and concert halls, reading room easy chairs) and a typical effect of aesthetic experience. Escaping such concerns and

tragedy. And we can appreciate the aesthetic qualities of the fog or storm while fearing the dangers they present, although it is also true that the latter can distract us from the former.

Skeptical doubts about the notion of disinterest, as variously interpreted, are once more raised by Dickie and Zemach, among others. Zemach (1997) argues that an aesthetic interest in objects is simply one interest among other possible ones, and a self-centered interest at that, aiming at one's own enjoyment. To call only this interest 'disinterest' is misleading at best. In opposition to Kant's characterization, we *are* interested in the real existence of the objects we perceive aesthetically. We would not enjoy a performance of an opera in the same way if we knew that the singers were only moving their lips to a recording, or if they were only life-sized holograms; similarly if members of a symphony orchestra were only soundlessly moving to computer generated tones. A reproduction of a painting does not affect us in the same way as the original, even if phenomenally indistinguishable from it.

Dickie (1964) claims that the concept of disinterest represents both a confusion of the motivation for perceiving with a way of perceiving, and a trivial demand for paying attention to the aesthetic object itself. What interest motivates one to look at an object can be irrelevant to how one perceives it: a critic may be motivated primarily to write his review and earn his salary, but he may pay close attention to the aesthetic qualities of the orchestral performance because of that motivation. What attitude theorists call disinterested perception is not really a different attitude or way of perceiving or paying attention, but a freedom from distraction by personal associations, fear, economic preoccupations, daydreams, and so on.

In regard to Stolnitz's claim that aesthetic perception aims at the object in isolation from other things, both Kendall Walton (1970) and Arthur Danto (1981) have argued persuasively that how one classifies an art work, where it fits into the art historical narrative, very much affects those aesthetic properties one perceives it to have. What is bold and daring, or graceful, in one style is not in another. Knowledge of the historical context of a work, including its proper classification, is required for proper appreciation of its aesthetic qualities. Even removing certain works from the context of practical affairs prevents proper aesthetic appreciation of them. Much contemporary art reflects the techniques and themes of a technological, mass productive, and materially obsessed age, and the mundane and practical aspects of life in this age. Ignoring the context of practical life loses the point of these works. Older art too may better be appreciated in its narrower practical or concrete context. Taking part in a religious service, using a cathedral for that purpose, can heighten rather than distract from the aesthetic experience of the building (Fenner 1996: 80).

entering other worlds, even temporarily and metaphorically, is also a major part of its value for us. Whether we call the perceptual and cognitive activity and affective receptivity that generates such experience a special attitude is a purely verbal affair.

See also Kant, Sibley, Aesthetic universals, Taste, Beauty, Fakes and forgeries.

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17 TASTE

Carolyn Korsmeyer

The idea of taste is embedded in discourse about aesthetic appreciation and art, both in philosophy and in ordinary conversation. People are praised if they display good taste in their choice of art, entertainment, clothes, or behavior to others; they are criticized for dubious preferences and inappropriate demeanor. Popular and public art is sometimes actually suppressed if it appears to violate norms of taste. These activities suggest that 'taste' labels a set of preferences and dispositions that admit shared social standards and public criticism. At the same time, as the saying goes, there is no accounting for taste.' Aesthetic responses are also understood as immediate and powerful reactions that are not wholly the result of deliberation or choice. Just as a love of chocolate seems immune to persuasion, taste for decoration, music, movies or other art seems in part to be dependent upon an individual's psychological make-up and personality. How can both these ways of thinking be sound? This question generates what philosophers of earlier times called the 'problem of taste,' for aesthetics has always harbored an uneasy tension between the necessity of critical standards for judging art works and the fact that those standards rely upon the subjective responses of the individuals appreciating art, which are notoriously variable.

A study of taste, therefore, requires consideration of perception and the determinants of appreciation. It raises the difficult question of just what is the *object* of aesthetic appreciation. Are aesthetic qualities so grounded in personal responses that beauty is truly in the eye of the beholder? Or do standards of taste, however indirectly, indicate some degree of realism for the qualities we appreciate in art and other objects? If we maintain that there are standards for the enjoyment entailed by the exercise of taste, how do we distinguish good from bad taste? Moreover, why do we sometimes find ourselves actually preferring things we suspect are in bad taste, changing channels from a concert of classical music by a composer we admire to a cop show, for example? Probably many of us genuinely like certain movies, songs, dances that we acknowledge are not of the highest merit. While aesthetic taste is