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CHAPTER 5

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

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1. THE AESTHETIC STATE OF MIND

THERE is a long history of discussions of the aesthetic and of art in which the fundamental concepts are psychological, in the sense of being or including concepts of states of mind. Examples include Aristotle's discussion of the tragic emotions of pity and fear, Aquinas's account of beauty in terms of delight in contemplation, and Kant's discussion of the disinterested pleasure characteristic of awareness of the beautiful. In addition to aesthetic emotion, aesthetic contemplation, and aesthetic pleasure, such concepts have included aesthetic perception, the aesthetic attitude, and aesthetic appreciation.

This chapter surveys attempts by aestheticians writing in the Anglo-American analytic tradition during the last half of the twentieth century to clarify, defend, and use the idea of a distinctively aesthetic state of mind. Their ambitions typically include most or all of the following: (i) giving an account of what distinguishes the aesthetic state of mind from other states of mind that are like it in some ways, such as sensual pleasure or drug-induced experience, or from those connected with other realms of human concern, such as the religious, the cognitive, the practical, and the moral; (ii) giving that account in a way that appeals neither to any prior idea of the aesthetic nor to the concept of art; (iii) explaining related ideas of the distinctively aesthetic, e.g. the ideas of aesthetic properties, qualities, aspects, or

concepts, of the aesthetic object, of the aesthetic judgement, and of aesthetic value, in terms of the idea of the distinctively aesthetic state of mind; and (iv) defending some more or less close connection between the realm of the aesthetic thereby explained and the realm of art, while recognizing that the aesthetic state of mind may appropriately be directed towards or grounded in non-art (e.g. nature) as well.

2. TWO CONCEPTS OF EXPERIENCE

The concept of *aesthetic experience* has sometimes been taken as the generic idea of a distinctively aesthetic state of mind, covering any or all of the more specific states mentioned above. Experience in general, however, is typically conceived of in more determinate ways than merely as an otherwise unspecified state of mind. Two different, more specific, concepts of experience are that of experience as something characterized primarily by 'what it is like' to undergo it, and that of experience as involving direct or non-inferential knowledge: the first may be called a *phenomenological* concept of experience, the second an *epistemic* one. The former is invoked when we wonder what the experience of bats is like; the latter, when we claim that hearing rather than seeing is the primary mode of experience whereby bats know their location relative to neighbouring objects.

A phenomenological conception of *aesthetic* experience, accordingly, is a conception of what it is like to have an aesthetic experience. Versions of the idea of an introspectively identifiable and phenomenologically distinctive aesthetic experience appear in some of the canonical works of such early twentieth-century Anglo-American aestheticians as Clive Bell, Edward Bullough, and John Dewey. (Not surprisingly, twentieth-century continental phenomenologists such as Roman Ingarden and Mikel Dufrenne also develop and defend related ideas.)

An epistemic conception of aesthetic experience, on the other hand, is a conception of a non-inferential way of coming to know something—comparable, say, to seeing that something is a chair—which deserves to be thought of as aesthetic. Monroe Beardsley, one of the founders of the Anglo-American aesthetic tradition of the latter half of the twentieth-century, began by defending a phenomenological idea of aesthetic experience. Under persistent pressure from George Dickie, another influential and important early aesthete in this tradition, however, his views gradually evolved in the direction of an epistemic notion. Most recent attempts to defend the notion of aesthetic experience within this tradition, while not in general incompatible with the idea of a phenomenologically distinctive aesthetic experience, see it in fundamentally epistemic terms. This chapter traces the evolution from Beardsley's early phenomenological account and Dickie's critique to current epistemic accounts and continuing critiques of the whole idea of an aesthetic state of mind.

3. THE BEARDSLEY-DICKIE DEBATE

Monroe Beardsley (1958), although influenced by contemporary linguistic philosophies to identify aesthetics with the study of the principles involved in 'clarifying and confirming critical statements', was also influenced by Dewey's account of the 'consummatory' experience he identified with the aesthetic. Beardsley's account, and the subsequent exchanges between him and George Dickie, were seminal for later Anglo-American discussions of aesthetic experience.

Beardsley (1958) eschews any definition of art, but works rather from a disjunctive account of the notion of what he calls an aesthetic object. Contrary to appearances, this appeal to the idea of the aesthetic object does not really involve abandoning the idea of the aesthetic experience as basic in the aesthetic realm. Beardsley says: 'We can...group together disjunctively the class of musical compositions, visual designs, literary works, and all other separately defined classes of objects, and give the name "aesthetic object" to them all...' (p. 64), and this sounds more like an account of the work of art than a first move in an account of the aesthetic. If such a disjunctive account suggests anti-essentialist scruples about defining art of the sort that were just then beginning to be expressed, it is also the case that such scruples were being expressed about the concept of the aesthetic in general and about aesthetic experience in particular. For Beardsley, nevertheless, such a rough indication of the extension of the class of aesthetic objects (works of art) is sufficient to motivate the search for the characteristically aesthetic experience in the form of the question whether there are certain features of experience that are peculiarly characteristic of our intercourse with such objects.

Introspection, checkable by each enquirer, yields the result that these experiences do indeed have something distinctive in common. They are complex, intense, and unified (this latter in two different ways, as coherent and complete). Experiences similar in some ways, for example watching an athletic contest or appreciating a mathematical proof, have some but not all of the relevant features. The degree of complexity, intensity, and unity (in sum, the magnitude) of the aesthetic experience, though directly related to the complexity, intensity, and unity of the aesthetic object on which it is directed, is not reducible to them: it is a feature of the experience itself. The aesthetic value of aesthetic objects (works of art), then, lies in their capacity to produce experiences of this kind, and these experiences are in turn valuable in various ways for those who have them—for example in integrating the self, refining perception and discrimination, and developing imagination and sympathy.

Dickie (1965) criticizes Beardsley's transfer of terms such as complexity, intensity, and unity from the objects of aesthetic experience to the experience itself, concentrating especially on the coherence and completeness that on Beardsley's view constitute the unity of the aesthetic experience. Dickie grants that aesthetic objects (works of art) can be coherent and complete, for example, and that we can experience their

coherence and completeness; but he insists that it is simply a mistaken vestige of idealism that leads us to take an experience of certain properties as an experience of *having* those properties. We confuse an experience of completeness with the completeness of an experience. In a context where the very idea of an aesthetic experience is that of an experience that is phenomenologically identifiable as unified, then the upshot is that there are no such things as aesthetic experiences, so that any account of the aesthetic value of objects based on their capacity to produce such experiences is radically ill founded. (Some philosophers might find the idea that works of art objectively have properties like unity more dubious than the idea that an experience can be unified; others, who might grant that both experiences and their objects can have properties such as unity, intensity, and complexity, might think it too good to be true that these properties 'line up' in such a way that the objects of unified, intense, and complex experiences are, as Beardsley maintains, themselves unified, intense, and complex.)

Beardsley (1969), replying to Dickie, defends the completeness of the experience in addition to that of the object experienced, claiming, as against Dickie, that the experience of a complete aesthetic object is only part of a complete experience—a fulfilment of an expectation, for example—and that such an experience, even though extended in time, *becomes* phenomenologically complete in itself when the expectation is fulfilled.

In Beardsley (1969) there is also a somewhat different and more formal account of what an aesthetic experience is:

A person is having an aesthetic experience during a particular stretch of time if and only if the greater part of his mental activity during that time is united and made pleasurable by being tied to the form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object on which his primary attention is concentrated. (Beardsley 1969: 5)

The concept of unity—the Deweyan idea of *an* experience *par excellence*—remains prominent, but the concepts of intensity and complexity fade into the background. The concept of pleasure, mentioned only incidentally in Beardsley (1958), becomes an essential feature of the aesthetic experience, and the experience is essentially and not merely contingently tied to the 'form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object'. Notice, too, that neither an antecedent conception of the aesthetic nor the concept of a work of art is invoked in this characterization.

This account seems to be edging towards the border between the phenomenological and the epistemic notions of experience. The essential inclusion of the tie to the presented or intended object and its form and qualities suggests that the experience is a kind of cognition. On the other hand, Beardsley is clear that the object and qualities in question need be only *phenomenally* objective—that is to say that, like colours but unlike pains, for instance, they *present* themselves to us as qualities of something other than ourselves—but they need not be properties of

actual objects distinct from ourselves. By the same token, it seems that, even though there might be only some aspects of the experience—its being unified and pleasurable for example—concerning which one can sensibly ask what it is *like* to have an experience of that sort, the aesthetic experience as described, unlike seeing or knowing of a genuinely epistemic kind, is plausibly entirely accessible introspectively.

Responding to Beardsley (1969), Dickie (1974) concedes that experiences as well as their objects can be unified, interpreting this as the claim that ‘affects’ (feelings, emotions, expectations, satisfactions) can be related to one another in such a way as to constitute a complete and coherent experience. He objects, however, that, even granting this much to Beardsley, Beardsley’s revised account of aesthetic experience invoking this experiential unity is too narrow in at least two ways. First, Dickie argues, there are undoubted aesthetic experiences that arouse none of the affects mentioned above, for instance the experience of certain kinds of abstract paintings. (Dickie cites no specific examples, but perhaps has in mind works like some of those by Kenneth Noland or Sol LeWitt.) Further, where affects are aroused, as by watching a decent production of *Hamlet*, there is no reason to suppose that those affects must be unified. Dickie concludes that aesthetic experiences ‘do not have any affective features which are peculiarly characteristic and which distinguish them from other experiences’, and that such experiences can be distinguished from others, if at all, only by their being derived from what is antecedently characterizable as an aesthetic object.

To these arguments, Beardsley (1982) replies that the elements whose connections with one another might make a passage of experience coherent (and thus unified) comprise not only feelings but also thoughts, so that aesthetic experiences might still be unified even if they do not include feelings. He claims further that Dickie’s examples of allegedly affectless aesthetic experiences are plausible only if one confuses feelings with ‘full-fledged’ emotions (presumably involving conceptual as well as affective elements); the absence of emotion from a passage of experience by no means implies the absence of feeling.

Beardsley (1982) thus continues to defend the existence of something like the Deweyan idea of *an* aesthetic experience, involving an overarching unity in some stretch of one’s mental life. Significantly, however, he concedes that ‘only a very limited account of our aesthetic life’ can be given in terms of experiences of this sort. He therefore introduces ‘a broader concept of the aesthetic in experience, while reserving the term “aesthetic experience,” as a count noun, for rather special occasions’.

He suggests that his introduction of the concept of pleasure in Beardsley (1969) was a first move in this direction, presumably because pleasure is more common than Deweyan consummatory experiences, but he now finds it ‘threateningly reductionistic’ to take pleasure as definitive of the aesthetic, even as he concedes that his original Deweyan view erred in the opposite direction.

He also backs away from any claim of jointly sufficient and separately necessary conditions for this broader notion of the aesthetic in experience, instead proposing

five 'criteria', concerning which he claims that the first is necessary and that it and any three of the other four are sufficient. The first criterion is *object directedness*, 'a willingly accepted guidance over the succession of one's mental states by phenomenally objective properties'; the others are *felt freedom*, 'a sense of release from the dominance of some antecedent concerns about past and future', *detached affect*, 'a sense that objects on which interest is concentrated are set a little at a distance emotionally', *active discovery*, 'a sense of actively exercising constructive powers of the mind', and *wholeness*, 'a sense of integration as a person . . . and a corresponding contentment'.

In this account, then, although anti-essentialist scruples once again come to the fore, now concerning aesthetic experience rather than art, and although there is only a faint echo of the Deweyan idea of unity, now conceived of as the 'wholeness' of the self rather than as the coherence and completeness of one of its experiences, Beardsley still claims to distinguish an aesthetic state of mind and to do so without appeal to any prior idea of the aesthetic or the artistic.

The other ambitions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter are still intact in Beardsley (1982), in which he proposes to define the aesthetic point of view in terms of aesthetic value:

To adopt the aesthetic point of view with regard to *X* is to take an interest in whatever aesthetic value *X* may possess (p. 19)

and to define aesthetic value in terms of aesthetic gratification (where 'aesthetic gratification' is a variation on 'aesthetic experience'):

The aesthetic value of *X* is the value that *X* possesses in virtue of its capacity to provide aesthetic gratification *when correctly perceived*. [emphasis in the original]. (p. 26)

The move outside the circle of aesthetic notions is made in the claim that

Gratification is aesthetic when it is obtained primarily from attention to the formal unity and/or the regional qualities of a complex whole, and when its magnitude is a function of the degree of formal unity and/or the intensity of regional quality. (p. 22)

In making this move, Beardsley notes that he here distinguishes aesthetic gratification from other kinds of gratification solely in terms of what it is gratification *in*.

Concerning the relationship between aesthetic states of mind and non-art items, Beardsley says hardly anything, but there seems to be no reason to suppose that nature cannot provide aesthetic gratification as he describes it, and he does give at least one example of the aesthetic point of view being adopted towards a natural scene.

Regarding the relation of the aesthetic state of mind to art, he overcomes anti-essentialist scruples about art long enough to hazard a disjunctive *definition* of a work of art as fundamentally something intended to produce that state of mind:

An artwork is *either* an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording an experience with marked aesthetic character *or* (incidentally) an arrangement belonging to a class or type of such arrangements. (p. 299)

The virtual abandonment of anything like the Deweyan conception of *an* experience as a condition of the aesthetic, however, makes the resulting view look even less phenomenological than its immediate predecessor. By the same token, the suggestion that aesthetic experience is in fact not just aesthetic gratification, but aesthetic gratification afforded by the *correct* perception of an object, evidently entails that it is no longer possible to determine introspectively that one's experience is aesthetic, for one cannot in general determine introspectively that one's perception of an object is correct. For the same reason, the appeal to correct perception is a major step in the direction of an overtly epistemic way of thinking about aesthetic experience.

Though phenomenologists writing in English continue to defend phenomenological accounts of the aesthetic experience (see e.g. Mitias 1988), most recent Anglo-American philosophers sympathetic to any project involving the four aims mentioned at the beginning of this chapter have assumed or tried to defend epistemic accounts of experiencing aesthetically.

4. PROBLEMS FOR THEORIES OF THE AESTHETIC STATE OF MIND

The objections by Dickie to Beardsley just discussed concentrate on the very intelligibility of Beardsley's attempts to delineate the aesthetic in psychological terms more than on their extensional adequacy, and the criticisms of the latter kind that Dickie offers are also psychological in the sense that they claim that Beardsley's view is too narrow in placing unwarranted psychological limitations on aesthetic experience (for instance, that it must involve affect).

A more common way of arguing that a conception of aesthetic experience is too narrow is to claim that it results in an excessively formalistic view of what matters about works of art, and thus of what the appreciator must notice in order to experience them correctly and what the critic should consider in interpreting and evaluating them.

The basis for this sort of objection is not only a claimed close connection between art and the aesthetic (e.g. the claim that aesthetic qualities *are* the qualities a critic or appreciator of art must grasp in order to understand and evaluate a work), but also the assumption of a connection between aesthetic experience and some other area of the realm of the aesthetic (e.g. the assumption that aesthetic qualities can be explained as the appropriate objects of aesthetic experience).

This objection often begins by appealing to another psychological notion of the aesthetic, the notion of the *aesthetic attitude*, a state of mind variously described as distanced, detached, or disinterested. (Dickie 1974 subjects various versions of this

view to criticisms similar to the ones he brings against Beardsley's account of the aesthetic experience, though Beardsley himself does not appeal to the notion of the aesthetic attitude.) The idea of the aesthetic attitude is often taken to be logically prior to that of the aesthetic experience—an aesthetic experience is what one has if, under the right circumstances, one takes the aesthetic attitude. The crucial thing about this attitude is that in it one *ignores or suppresses* some occurrent state or states of mind, for example the desire that a concert one is attending be financially successful and the thought that the hall is barely half full, in the interests of making room for another, say, the enjoyment of the concert.

Given this picture of different states of mind competing for mental space, and the obvious fact that *some* states of mind can effectively preclude anything that could be called an aesthetic experience (as preoccupation with a concert's finances can prevent one from enjoying it), there is a strong temptation to try to make the mind safe for aesthetic experience, so to speak, by lengthening the list of states of mind to be ignored or suppressed in the aesthetic attitude, consequently shortening the list of states of mind compatible with aesthetic experience, and, correlatively, the list of properties appropriate as the object of such experience, and thus relevant for the interpretation, appreciation, and evaluation of works of art. The question is where to draw the line, but the extreme to which this process tends is a view of aesthetic experience as resolutely segregated from historical or contextual knowledge or moral, religious, and political beliefs, and a view of qualities of form and design of works of art as exhibited in their mere appearances as their only aesthetically relevant properties. (Beardsley's list of the properties that afford aesthetic gratification, quoted above, goes some distance in the direction of this extreme but does not reach all the way to it, given its inclusion of 'regional qualities', among which Beardsley numbers features such as garishness and gracefulness.)

Another problem for accounts of aesthetic experience in general has been that they are in danger of being too broad, seeming to encompass experiences that are not aesthetic, for instance sexual experiences and drug experiences. The view that such experiences are not aesthetic seems to depend on the very plausible assumption that sexual partners and pills are not works of art, as well as the more contentious assumption that the connection between art and the aesthetic is such that granting that experiences like these *are* aesthetic would imply that they were (or at least had some claim to being considered to be) works of art.

Finally, to the extent that these accounts are genuinely psychological (as opposed to, say, to being sociological, historical, or anthropological), they seem to presuppose that aesthetic experience is in some sense generically *human*, not restricted to any one historical period, social class, or culture. In consequence, their defenders must have some reply to theorists who suggest that the very idea of the aesthetic as it is understood by contemporary philosophers is a creation of the eighteenth-century European bourgeois Enlightenment (see e.g. Eagleton 1990) and to anthropologists who find it highly problematic that people in non-Western or pre-literate or pre-historic societies have

anything like the same kind of experience that we contemporary Westerners characteristically have when we attend to works of art.

Recent epistemic accounts of aesthetic experience, then, have generally not only been constructed with most or all of the four ambitions listed at the beginning of this chapter in mind: they must also have been designed to confront charges of psychological myth-making, of excessive formalism about art, of a failure adequately to distinguish aesthetic experience from its near neighbours, and of the dubious attribution of a characteristically modern Western experience to pre-modern and/or non-Western people.

5. FOUR RECENT EPISTEMIC ACCOUNTS OF THE AESTHETIC STATE OF MIND

Prominent recent epistemic accounts of aesthetic experience include those offered by Malcolm Budd, Jerrold Levinson, Kendall Walton, and Roger Scruton.

In Budd (1995) the discussion of aesthetic experience is part of an account of value in works of art. Budd's central claim is that the 'artistic value' of a work of art consists in the 'intrinsic value of the experience the work offers', where the experience the work offers is taken to be an experience in which the work is understood and its qualities directly grasped.

A notable feature of this claim is that the notion of the aesthetic does not appear in it. Budd does not call the experience the work offers an aesthetic experience; in fact, he rarely uses the term 'aesthetic'. At one point he does say that a work's *artistic* (not aesthetic) value depends on its *aesthetic* (not artistic) qualities, so it would perhaps be possible to construct on the basis of this and his central claim an account of the aesthetic experience as the experience of what the work offers, and to conjecture that substituting 'aesthetic' for 'artistic' in the phrase 'artistic value' would not be seriously misleading in this context. To do this would shift the explanatory burden to the notion of aesthetic qualities—or else run the danger of making *any* quality of a work of art that can be experienced with understanding relevant to its artistic value. Unless something like this is done, however, it is not at all clear that the experience in question, explained as it is in terms of the understanding of works of art and yielding a criterion of value for works of art, could be afforded, for example, by nature.

On the other hand, Budd might well view the whole enterprise of carving out a realm of the aesthetic—the whole apparatus of aesthetic experience, aesthetic objects, aesthetic qualities, aesthetic value, and their ilk—as fundamentally misguided. What would remain is an epistemic state of mind that is especially appropriate to works of

art, that is indeed initially identified by its relation to artworks. Budd plausibly claims that his view is free of such psychological myths as a specific aesthetic emotion or a 'disconnected' attitude appropriate to art, and there seems no reason to suppose that one must be literate or Western or have a particular—indeed, any—concept of the aesthetic to value intrinsically the experience that something affords.

Budd's view, moreover, is far from narrowly formalistic, for he insists that an understanding of a work's message and its history is essential to 'the experience it affords'. Nor is there any danger that this state of mind, defined in Budd's way, will be confused with, for example, drug experiences. But neither is it clear how he would deal with the intuition that appropriate experiences of nature and of works of art have something in common that distinguishes them from drug experiences. Finally, read this way, the whole account is hostage to a prior understanding of the concept of art. Budd's view may perhaps best be taken as an attempt to capture the idea that what matters most about works of art is the experience they afford, *without* appealing to the idea of a specifically aesthetic experience (or the idea of an aesthetic anything else).

Levinson (1996) provides an account of aesthetic pleasure based, at least implicitly, on an account of what it is to experience something aesthetically:

Pleasure in an object is aesthetic when it derives from apprehension of and reflection on the object's individual character and content, both for itself and in relation to the structural base on which it rests. (Levinson 1996: 6)

Levinson immediately infers something tantamount to the claim that apprehending and reflecting on something in the specified way is *appreciating* it aesthetically, from which it seems to follow straightforwardly that *experiencing* something aesthetically is apprehending and reflecting on its individual character and content, both for itself and in relation to the structural base on which it rests.

This account resembles Beardsley's account of aesthetic gratification, in that it distinguishes aesthetic pleasure (or appreciation or experience) from other kinds in terms of its intentional object. In Beardsley's case it was not entirely clear whether the object in question was merely phenomenal. In Levinson's it seems clear that it is not, which suggests that in some sense what is aesthetic about the state of mind is no longer its mental aspect. In one way, at least, the basic idea of the aesthetic here seems to be the idea of the properties and relations apprehended, which might as well be dubbed aesthetic properties.

It may be, therefore, that Levinson no longer wholeheartedly shares the ambition of distinguishing an aesthetic state of mind. He is thus perhaps relatively unlikely to be suspected of psychological myth-making; in general, too, there seems no reason to suppose that prior to the eighteenth-century invention of the aesthetic, or in pre-literate or pre-historic societies, people were unable to 'apprehend and reflect on' something's 'individual character and content'. (Anthropological evidence that they do or did is presented in Maquet (1986), and relevant philosophical support is supplied in Davies (1999) and Dutton (1999), albeit in a context in which

the main question is whether other cultures have art, rather than whether people in those cultures have aesthetic experience.)

Levinson clearly does aim to explain the aesthetic as independent of art, and he views nature as experienceable aesthetically in the same sense as art is. A start is made towards articulating connections between aesthetic pleasure and other parts of the realm of the aesthetic. The concept of aesthetic pleasure articulated here clearly does not apply to the pleasures of sex or drugs. Finally, the idea of what is to be 'apprehended and reflected on' in aesthetic appreciation is explicitly designed to be 'art-appropriate' in including matters of content and the way in which content is expressed that go well beyond the narrowly formal.

Walton (1993) discusses aesthetic pleasure in the course of developing a theory of aesthetic value, a theory initially focused squarely on the value of works of art. To gain the benefits of a work's value is to appreciate it, which is more than enjoying it:

'Aesthetic' pleasures include the pleasure of finding something valuable, of admiring it. One *appreciates* the work. One does not merely enjoy it; one takes pleasure or delight in judging it to be good. (Walton 1993: 504)

This account of aesthetic pleasure as pleasure taken in *noting* something's value is modified by requiring that the pleasure in question must not be merely self-congratulatory but must be pleasure in the *thing's* 'getting... [one] to admire it', and it must be pleasure that is *appropriate*, in some sense that includes but is evidently not limited to *moral* appropriateness.

This account of the complex and self-referential aesthetic state of mind is clearly an epistemic one. Though it is explicitly tailored to the experience of works of art, it is not clear on that account that one could not get aesthetic pleasure from a work *without* appropriately experiencing *it*, for example by hearing it, if it is a piece of music, so long as one *knew* that, for example, it was elegantly economical in expressing what it does. Couldn't one come to know this, for instance, by examining the score and the text, and thus come to enjoy admiring the piece?

There seems, though, to be nothing psychologically dubious or peculiarly modern and Western about the state of mind described, and the account speaks to the problem of distinguishing aesthetic pleasure from the merely sensual or drug-induced, while somewhat warily admitting some perhaps not obviously aesthetic pleasures into the club, such as pleasure in a hoe that is marvellously suited to its task. At the same time, the view, insisting as it does on the aesthetic relevance of a work's message and morality, is not formalistic.

Various other aesthetic notions, chiefly aesthetic value (the capacity to elicit aesthetic pleasure in appreciators), are explicated by Walton in terms of the aesthetic state of mind, while none of the terms used in explicating it ('appreciate', 'enjoy', 'admire', 'find value in') makes appeal to any prior notion of the aesthetic or the artistic.

Given that the account is explicitly framed to deal with the evaluation of works of art, or at least of artefacts in general, and given Walton's claim that 'admiration

is paradigmatically, if not essentially, an attitude we have in part towards people', the idea that nature can be the object of the aesthetic state of mind seems initially problematic for his view. The solution, which Walton suggests accounts for both similarities and differences between the appreciation of art and the appreciation of nature, is to claim that it is possible to replace *admiring* with a related attitude, such as *being in awe of* or *wondering at*, in *taking pleasure in admiring something*, without the resulting state of mind ceasing to be aesthetic.

The most striking feature of the concept of aesthetic experience defended in Scruton (1974) is the role the concept of imagination plays in it. Scruton insists that, for example, the sadness in a piece of music is not a genuine property of it, and that the judgement that a piece is sad is, therefore, *not* cognitive in the sense of having a truth value. Sadness is rather an 'aspect' of a piece, and our making the judgement that a piece is sad involves *imagining* that it is—entertaining but not asserting the thought that it is sad in the way that people are.

Aesthetic appreciation is then, roughly, the appropriate enjoyment of an object for its own sake. The force of the phrase 'enjoyment of an object for its own sake' is to restrict appreciation pretty much to direct experience of something, for example hearing a piece of music—neither free-floating fantasies nor purely intellectual cognitions generally qualify. Being thus restricted to 'an object for its own sake', it is natural, if not logically necessary, that we enrich our experience of it by exercising our imagination, 'thinking of, and attending to, a present object (by thinking of it, or perceiving it, in terms of something absent)', and the thoughts and feelings thus aroused by the object become 'part of the experience . . . itself, transform[ing] it without diverting it from its original object'.

Despite Scruton's explicit denial that aesthetic experience is cognitive in the sense of putting us in contact with properties of its objects, imaginative thinking, as an ingredient in aesthetic experience, must remain *grounded in* and *appropriate to* the object. To have an aesthetic experience of a piece of music as sad, for example, it must be appropriate to experience the piece in a way consonant with the thought of it as a sad person. This is sufficient, on Scruton's view, to make aesthetic appreciation an activity that is subject to rational evaluation, and seems to be enough to make the view an epistemic one in the broad sense that in it aesthetic experience is conceived of as subject to epistemic standards.

Scruton speaks of 'the aesthetic attitude' as essentially aiming at aesthetic appreciation as just characterized. But this is not a psychological myth of the sort critiqued by Dickie, nor does it or the aesthetic appreciation aimed at seem restricted to modern, literate, Western societies. Further, although imagination is not, for Scruton, definitive of the aesthetic, it is intimately enough associated with it to make it important that the concept of imagination be respectable; and Scruton certainly shows that it is an idea with wide application, and not just one conjured up for immediate theoretical purposes. Again, the object-directed and normative aspects of the aesthetic experience serve to distinguish it from such things as drug

experiences, and the incorporation of thought into the imaginative experience that so naturally enriches it both distinguishes aesthetic experience from sexual experience and allows aesthetic appreciation to extend beyond the narrowly formal.

Scruton, in contrast to Budd, shows no reluctance to invoke a wide variety of aesthetic notions—aesthetic aspects, aesthetic properties, aesthetic perception, the aesthetic object, aesthetic judgement—some of which he criticizes but others of which he uses relatively uncritically. Although he does not go far in relating them systematically, nothing but a lack of interest appears to stand in the way of his doing so.

Finally, it is for Scruton an important fact, but only a contingent one, that ‘the principal objects of aesthetic interest are works of art’. That this fact is contingent is shown by our clear ability to take an aesthetic attitude, incorporating imaginative thought, towards nature. On Scruton’s view, however, the discernment of expressive and representational features of objects, central to our aesthetic experience of them, typically depends on an understanding of those objects *as* works of art, which is not required for our appreciation of natural beauty:

The thoughts and feelings involved in aesthetic interest can acquire a full elaboration only if the aesthetic object possesses just those features that are characteristic of art. (Scruton 1974: 163)

Most epistemic accounts of aesthetic experience seem to assume a realistic account of the properties that are the objects of that experience. In something like the same way that non-realistic accounts of truth can sustain a distinction between knowledge and belief even in the absence of a commitment to real properties of objects, however, Scruton’s non-realistic account of aesthetic aspects can support a genuinely epistemic account of aesthetic experience, with the further advantage that a non-realistic account of aesthetic features seems more initially plausible than non-realism about properties generally.

6. TWO CRITIQUES OF RECENT THEORIES OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Richard Shusterman (1997) and Noël Carroll (2000), both of whom associate the recent revival of interest in the concept of aesthetic experience among philosophers with a reaction within the general culture to what Shusterman calls ‘the anaesthetic thrust of [the twentieth] . . . century’s artistic avant-garde’, criticize the results of this revival in different ways.

Shusterman identifies four central features of the ‘tradition of aesthetic experience’:

First, aesthetic experience is essentially valuable and enjoyable; call this its evaluative dimension. Second, it is something vividly felt and subjectively savored, affectively absorbing us and

focusing our attention on its immediate presence and thus standing out from the ordinary flow of routine experience; call this its phenomenological dimension. Third, it is meaningful experience, not mere sensation; call this its semantic dimension. . . . Fourth, it is a distinctive experience closely identified with the distinction of fine art and representing art's essential aim; call this the demarcational–definitional dimension. (Shusterman 1997: 30)

While situating his own work in both the analytic and Deweyan traditions, Shusterman usefully summarizes critiques of aesthetic experience by twentieth-century continental writers (e.g. Adorno, Benjamin, Heidegger, Gadamer, Bourdieu) as focusing on a conception of aesthetic experience ‘narrowly identified with fine art’s purely autonomous reception’ and requiring ‘mere phenomenological immediacy to achieve its full meaning,’ and he argues convincingly that such a faulty conception is not a necessary consequence of the four central features of the tradition he has identified.

Shusterman argues, however, that the Anglo-American critique and development of the concept of aesthetic since Dewey, beginning with Dickie’s critique of Beardsley, has unfortunately slighted the evaluational dimension, promoted the semantic at the expense of the phenomenological, and emphasized the demarcational–definitional, in contrast to a Deweyan ‘transformational’ conception, which would aim to ‘revise or enlarge the aesthetic field,’ rather than merely to ‘define, delimit, and explain the aesthetic status quo’.

Shusterman does not discuss any of the epistemic accounts mentioned above, but not only do they appear to be fully capable of answering the Continental critique as he describes it, but also they challenge in various ways his narrative of the trend in recent Anglo-American aesthetics and point in some of the same directions he favours. For one thing, although none emphasizes—and some deny—a distinctive phenomenology of aesthetic experience, the example of Beardsley suggests that this denial is not entailed by epistemic accounts. The distinction between phenomenological and epistemic accounts need not be an exclusive one, and epistemic accounts are not prevented from conceiving aesthetic experience as ‘vividly felt and subjectively savored’. Again, the value and enjoyability of aesthetic experience is a major theme in epistemic accounts, though Shusterman says more than they tend to say in defending that value against the anaestheticization not only of aesthetic theory, but of recent art.

On the other hand, the connection that epistemic accounts propose between aesthetic experience and art, though typically intimate, need not be a defining one. Moreover, even if it is, it typically does not ‘delimit’ the aesthetic experience in the sense of restricting it to art; nor does it necessarily promote the ‘aesthetic status quo’ in the sense that it is inimical to the idea that aesthetic experience may be afforded by novel and unexpected objects. It is not clear, therefore, that epistemic accounts are necessarily wrong to decline to follow Shusterman all the way back to Dewey.

If Shusterman seeks to recover a concept of aesthetic experience that began to erode with Dickie’s critique of Beardsley, Carroll aims to reinforce and amplify that

critique. On his view, the most that can be said about the aesthetic experience of an artwork is that it

involves design appreciation and/or the detection of aesthetic and expressive properties and/or attention to the ways in which the formal, aesthetic, and expressive properties of the artwork are contrived. (Carroll 2000: 207)

Such a 'deflationary, content-orientated, enumerative' approach is foreshadowed in the previously discussed writings of both Budd (1995) and Levinson (1996), following Beardsley (1982); but in Carroll's paper it more clearly emerges from a thoroughgoing critique of more ambitious views. (Note, too, that Carroll explicitly limits his discussion to the aesthetic experience of artworks, thus deliberately bypassing the question whether there is some aesthetic state of mind common to our intercourse with artworks and with nature, a policy perhaps in keeping with his deflationary conclusion.)

Carroll argues that the 'essentialist' aim of discovering some 'common thread' that runs through experiences of the sorts of properties just enumerated is a failure, in particular, that what he takes to be the central thesis of those who defend more substantive accounts of the aesthetic state of mind—the thesis that an essential feature of aesthetic experience is that it is valued for its own sake—cannot be sustained. (Like Shusterman, Carroll does not discuss any of the epistemic accounts mentioned above, but the idea of intrinsic value has been seen to be particularly prominent in Budd 1995.)

In defending this position, Carroll first points out that there is a long history of instrumental defences of aesthetic experience, and that in fact people who value the experience of the mentioned properties of artworks frequently insist that they value such experiences instrumentally, for the various goods such as insight, self-improvement, and the like that they allegedly provide. (Recall claims of this sort, mentioned above, in Beardsley 1958.) As an objection to the idea of intrinsic valuing, this observation seems to depend at least in part on supposing that, if one values something intrinsically, then one cannot *also* value it instrumentally. Such a view could perhaps be reasonably attributed to those who think of the aesthetic state of mind as largely excluding other states of mind (those, for example, who defend certain conceptions of the 'distanced' aesthetic attitude); but the defenders of the aesthetic state of mind as in part constituted by intrinsic valuing are not necessarily to be found among them—at least, not in virtue of their commitment to that view of the aesthetic state of mind.

Even if this point is waived and it is supposed, as seems plausible, that nothing logically prevents someone from simultaneously valuing an experience both intrinsically and instrumentally, this fact makes the attribution of intrinsic valuing of such experiences in particular cases problematic in the face of what Carroll sees as the general adequacy of instrumental valuing to explain people's motivations in seeking out such experiences, for such attributions would then come to depend on

dubious intuitions about what people *would* have done had they *not* valued such experiences instrumentally. Valuing intrinsically, then, at least as applied to aesthetic experience, threatens to dissolve into another psychological myth.

Even if we suppose that the idea of valuing an experience intrinsically is not in itself suspect, however, Carroll insists that the view that

aesthetic experience is necessarily a matter of experience valued for its own sake . . . seems wildly implausible. (Carroll 2000: 204)

He asks us to imagine two people in 'precisely the same type-identical computational state relevant to understanding and processing' a painting, one of whom values that understanding and processing intrinsically but not instrumentally, the other of whom values it instrumentally but not intrinsically. (We may imagine that the latter is, say, an evolutionary psychologist who espouses a theory according to which experience of a painting is never in fact valued intrinsically but is seen as worth having only because it provides benefits such as enhancing the viewer's discriminatory powers.) One's experience has been motivated by a belief different from the other's, but it seems 'perfectly arbitrary and completely unsatisfactory' to maintain, as one who takes a finding of intrinsic value to be logically necessary for the having of an aesthetic experience must, that '[one] . . . is undergoing an aesthetic experience, but [the other] . . . is not' (and indeed cannot, so long as he persists in holding a theory incompatible with his intrinsically valuing such experience).

The defender of intrinsic valuing as essential to aesthetic experience may reply, first, that the alleged incapacity of the evolutionary psychologist to have an aesthetic experience on the view in question seems no more necessary than, say, the alleged inability of a sceptic to know anything, or of an eliminative materialist to hold any beliefs at all. That a theory entails that a certain state of mind is impossible does not itself entail that a holder of that theory cannot *be* in that state.

On the other hand, the 'mental processing' that is 'type-identical' between Carroll's two imagined viewers certainly exemplifies the kind of state that epistemic accounts of the aesthetic state of mind emphasize, and it perhaps deserves to be called an aesthetic *experience* in the epistemic sense of 'experience' if anything does. But it seems to be open to the defender of the idea of a distinctively aesthetic state of mind to regard that state as complex in something like the way that, on the account in Walton (1993), aesthetic pleasure, i.e. pleasure in judging something to be good, is. Just as that state, according to Walton, is compounded out of taking pleasure and finding value, the aesthetic state of mind, on the view to which Carroll objects, may be compounded, in a different way, out of finding value and experiencing in an epistemic sense. Whether such an account could evade Carroll's objections and at the same time fulfil most or all of the four ambitions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter remains to be seen. (For an attempt to characterize an aesthetic state of mind—specifically, aesthetic appreciation, in something like this way—see Iseminger 1981; for a development of this characterization specifically in the service of an aesthetic account of the nature of art, see Anderson 1999.)

7. CONCLUSION

In general, epistemic accounts of the aesthetic state of mind need not depend on psychologically mythical states of mind (at least, not on mythical states of mind that are peculiarly aesthetic), nor on states of mind unavailable to members of pre-literate, pre-historic, or non-Western societies. They are capable of answering the most obvious objections to the effect that they lead to excessive formalism about art and that they are unable to distinguish the aesthetic state of mind from those associated with drug experiences or sensual pleasures. They can be characterized without appeal to the concept of art or to prior concepts of the aesthetic. They are consistent with, but do not entail, the view that aesthetic experience has a distinctive phenomenology. Where a defender of such an account aims to use it to articulate such related notions as aesthetic value, an epistemic idea of aesthetic experience appears to enter into relations appropriate for such articulation, though it may be that in pursuing this aim some other idea of the aesthetic, such as aesthetic properties, ultimately emerges as basic. Epistemic accounts of aesthetic experience seem able to explain the close connection between art and the aesthetic while still allowing for the aesthetic experience of nature. If one is inclined to believe that there is an aesthetic state of mind and that it is worthwhile to be in it, it seems reasonable to continue to pursue most or all of the four aims mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in the course of trying to make precise an idea of the aesthetic state of mind that incorporates an epistemic conception of aesthetic experience.

See also: Aesthetic Realism 1; Aesthetic Realism 2; Beauty; Aesthetics of Nature; Value in Art; Aesthetics and Cognitive Science.

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