

# For the Love of Art: Artistic Values and Appreciative Virtue

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It is argued that instrumentalizing the value of art does an injustice to artistic appreciation and provides a hostage to fortune. Whilst aestheticism offers an intellectual bulwark against such an approach, it focuses on what is distinctive of art at the expense of broader artistic values. It is argued that artistic appreciation and creativity involve not just skills but excellences of character. The nature of particular artistic or appreciative virtues and vices are briefly explored, such as snobbery, aestheticism and creativity, in order to motivate a virtue theoretic approach. Artistic virtues are intrinsically valuable excellences of character that enable us to create or appreciate all sorts of things from everyday recipes to the finest achievements of humankind. Such an approach offers a new way to resist the age old temptation to instrumentalize the values of art.

## Introduction

It is a commonplace to bestow a high value on art. We often look to works of art for pleasure, insight, emotional expression, solace or glorification. This is not to say that art plays the same roles in the lives of all. Nonetheless, engaging in appreciative or artistic activities of one sort or another is important to many. The mere fact that certain activities are significant for people bestows a certain kind of value on them. They are valuable just in virtue of people valuing them. Yet why activities matter makes a difference as to how and why we should value them. Train spotting or playing games, for example, matters to some, yet such activities do not have the same kind of value that pertain to artistic creation and appreciation. Why? Well at a minimum we might say that some pleasures are deeper than others. But that does not get us very far. After all, we might ask, what is it that makes the pleasures of art run deeper than the pleasures of many other activities (if indeed they do)?

## The Instrumentalization of Art

It is testimony to the presumption in favour of art that we have so many museums, concert halls and libraries. Indeed public taxation often subsidizes the collection and exhibition of works in buildings that amount to secular temples. It is, we might think, a mark of a civilized culture that it respects artistic achievement. It is also, we might think, the mark of a fair society that it seeks to cultivate appreciative capacities and access to art for all. Yet given the call on public resources what kind of justification can or should we give for the claims of art? On the one hand why give money for art rather than, say, the pleasures afforded by theme parks or through playing sport? On the other hand, why devote money to mere pleasures at all when we could give more to supporting people's health and well-being? Indeed, in times of financial austerity such questions seem particularly sharp.

The claims most commonly made on behalf of art, at least in the public sphere, emphasize further ends that art supposedly helps us to realize. In the U.K. the value of the arts, subsumed more generally under the cultural sector, is characterized from a public policy point of view in terms of socio-economic impact. Large claims are often made regarding the economic value of the creative industries or the creation of social capital and cohesion.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst there is much to be said in favour of such an approach (perhaps it is the only case that treasury departments are interested in), it is deeply problematic if it is the only case that is being made. Justifying art instrumentally, whether that be in economic, emotional or any other terms, threatens to lose sight of what is most significant about artistic creation and appreciation. It is to treat art as one practice amongst many, all of which can instrumentally lead to the same ends. Taking part in or following a particular sport, for example, may bring many of the same benefits. Football clearly can cultivate a sense of communal belonging, facilitate emotional expression and, given its

<sup>1</sup> The U.K. Department for Culture, Media and Sport has consistently emphasized that the cultural and creative industries promote economic growth. See, for example, the DCMS report *Staying Ahead: The Economic Performance of the U.K. Creative Industries* (2007). The recent DCMS commissioned report by David O'Brien, *Measuring the Value of Culture* (2010) examines how the arts might adopt economic valuation techniques that mesh with H. M. Treasury (as is the case with health and the environment). This is far from a parochial concern. See, for example, the U.S.A's National Endowment for the Arts report *Time and Money: Using Federal Data to Measure the Value of Performing Arts Activities* (2011).

popularity, bring large economic benefits with it. It might be tempting to respond that sport hardly cultivates insight and perhaps insight is the instrumental benefit art best promotes. Close followers of sports might disagree. The interest in many sports centres on battles of wits, wills and psychological dramas more generally. Hence 'this beautiful game that is battle and sport and service and art'<sup>2</sup> might be said of many sports. No matter. If we are looking for uncontroversial insight why invest in art rather than history, psychology or documentaries? What framing matters in such instrumental terms occludes, as we shall see, is how we appreciate, seek to do justice to and admire artworks.

The instrumentalization strategy also provides a great hostage to fortune. Consider the 'Mozart Effect'. It has become something of a popular myth to hold that listening to Mozart (and certain kinds of classical music more generally) can make you smarter. Don Campbell's popular psychology and business is based on endorsing a strong version of the claim; namely that listening to classical music enhances mental functioning and improves a wide variety of disorders.<sup>3</sup> The idea took hold to such an extent that Zell Miller, the governor of Georgia (USA), set aside over \$100,000 of the state budget in 1998 to provide every child with a classical music cd. Yet the original study initiating such a wave of enthusiasm was much more limited than popular uptake might suggest, only claiming to demonstrate that spatio-temporal abilities were *temporarily* enhanced after listening to Mozart (as measured by part of a standard I.Q. test).<sup>4</sup> It is even unclear that the music in the study is enhancing subjects' mental capacities as opposed to just setting a background mood enabling people to perform better. Indeed, the results of a range of meta-studies, conducted by Ellen Winner and colleagues at Project Zero, Harvard, show that many claims concerning art's capacity to improve our mental capacities remain unjustified.<sup>5</sup> Common assumptions about the instrumental benefits of art are often on shaky ground. If instrumentalism is the only public case made for art,

<sup>2</sup> As spoken by the famous England cricket captain Douglas Jardine in Michael Pinchbeck's play *The Ashes*.

<sup>3</sup> See Don Campbell, *The Mozart Effect* (New York: William Morrow Harper Collins, 1997) and products such as *The Mozart Effect – Music for Babies*.

<sup>4</sup> Frances H. Rauscher, Gordon L. Shaw and Catherine N. Ky, 'Music and Spatial Task Performance', *Nature* **365** (14<sup>th</sup> October, 1993), 111.

<sup>5</sup> See Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland (eds.), 'The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence Shows', *Journal of Aesthetic Education* **34** (2000).

then it could be that there is not much of a case after all (and perhaps most of the money spent on art should go to sport or health).

In what follows an alternative case is made for valuing art. Artistic value matters for appreciation (though this is not to say that is the only way it matters). Examining the plurality of artistic values and what is involved in appreciating them leads to the recognition that artistic appreciation is a skill. Yet it is also more than a *mere* skill. Why? Artistic appreciation depends upon certain motivations and dispositions. Art is tied up with intrinsically valuable dispositions to create or appreciate and these excellences are virtues of character. Appreciation and artistic creativity can also be undermined by what we might think of as appreciative vices (such as snobbery or sentimentality). Art is not just worthwhile because of what it is we appreciate. It is valuable because of the skills and character involved in appreciation.

### **Subjectivity, Objectivity and Appreciative Expertise**

Pleasure is often a mark of a work's value as art. However the mere fact that someone takes pleasure in a work (or some group of people do) does not show that it is good as art. Thomas Kinkade's kitsch landscapes are extremely popular in the U.S. and Jeffrey Archer's novels remain bestsellers in the U.K. Yet no one would seriously make claims to artistic greatness on behalf of such works. This is not to deny that there is such a thing as guilty pleasures in art. It is just that the pleasures are guilty due to knowingly enjoying works more than their quality or value merits. The failure to take pleasure in some works can also reflect something about us rather than the work. I may battle through the first 300 pages of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, complain that nothing seems to happen and give up. This may just reflect where I am at as a reader rather than tell us something about the value of Proust's literature. The point is our appreciation can be naïve or sophisticated, better or worse. How so?

Artistic appreciation may be subjective in the sense that it is tied to our responses and mental states (e.g. that I feel pleasure when reading novels). Nonetheless it does not follow that there is no disputing tastes. Why? First, at least part of the point of criticism is to make claims about the nature and value of works. Reviews, testimony by friends or the verdict of the test of time point us toward works that, it is claimed, are worth engaging with. Of course, they may be mistaken. That is the point. Second, critics also often point us toward contexts or aspects of works that alter our experience of them (for better

or worse). Imagine going to a free jazz concert and being frustrated by the discordant sound of the piano. A more musical friend points out that listening for the piece's harmonic qualities will be frustrating since the percussive nature of the piano is being foregrounded. Listening to the performance under a percussive aspect you might suddenly hear a previously unnoticed musical relationship between the piano and the drums. Much discussion about art is taken up with how to approach works in the most fruitful or appropriate ways. Third, as the music example suggests, our own experience shows that we can come to be better appreciators. When visiting galleries for the first time we may know little about what distinguishes expressionism, naturalism, classicism and baroque from medieval art. Lacking an understanding of context or an ability to appreciate various stylistic features we may consider medieval art to be artless. Yet with more background knowledge and greater experience we can come to see much more in works, at least good works, than we saw at first pass. We also sometimes revise our initial impression downwards, such as when experiencing a work again we get nothing more out of it than first time round and see its flaws more easily.

One model for the kind of objectivity presupposed is articulated by Hume's essay 'Of the Standard of Taste'.<sup>6</sup> Hume's idea is that artworks, like other kinds of objects, naturally give rise to certain kinds of responses in us. It is subjectivist in giving due recognition to the fact that what matters is our responses. Yet it affords an element of objectivity given what matters is how the object gives rise to our experiences. How so? First, someone's human nature can be defective or out of sorts. A colour blind person is a bad judge of colour just as someone with a fever may be unable to taste food. There is a huge range of sensory, emotional and cognitive deficits people can suffer from. Indeed, even being emotionally out of sorts might put someone in a bad position to appreciate artworks. In a state of suppressed rage someone might recognize the energetic nature of Matisse's *The Dance* without appreciating its serenity.

Nonetheless, as Hume recognized, it is not just a matter of possessing standard human nature in the relevant respects and being in an appropriate frame of mind. Appreciation can go also go awry because it is naïve. This is the lesson of Hume's wine tasting analogy when he refers to a story from *Don Quixote*.<sup>7</sup> Sancho's

<sup>6</sup> David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste', in his *Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1757]1993), 133–153.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. note 7, 141.

kinsmen arrive at a village and are invited to drink its wine. On tasting the wine, one kinsman notes that the flavour is marred by a hint of iron whilst the other claims to detect a leathery quality. Much amusement follows as the villagers poke fun at this apparent exposure of false sophistication. The villagers not only taste nothing wrong with the wine, Sancho's kinsmen can't even agree about the taste. Yet once the wine is finished, right down to the bottom of the barrel, what should be revealed but a rusty key bound to a leather thong. It is not that the villagers are radically mistaken about the nature of the wine. It is just that Sancho's kinsmen, who possess more refined palattes, can discriminate more keenly amongst certain elements in the taste of the wine. Thus, as Hume suggests, appreciation and good judgement requires something like 'good sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice.'<sup>8</sup>

Artistic appreciation depends upon a wide range of perceptual capacities and cognitive-affective responses that are in principle open to refinement. It is also the case that a work's artistically relevant features depend upon relational properties that may not be directly perceivable. Identifying the relevant representational, expressive or cognitive features of a work of art depends on knowledge of the categories it belongs to and, hence, relies on a large stock of relational knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Without relevant background knowledge and experiences, viewers cannot always be expected to fully appreciate something as an Expressionist painting, a late Rubens or spot ironic allusions to earlier work. Expertise is required and more naïve viewers will often miss, misidentify or only loosely appreciate subtle yet aesthetically relevant features. Why? Good appreciation requires comparative experience, background knowledge, the refinement of certain capacities and, crucially, insulation against irrelevant factors. This is an achievement.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit. note 7, 144.

<sup>9</sup> This includes, for example, the art historical categories required to apprehend appreciatively relevant features such as a work's expressive and representational features. See Kendall Walton, 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970), 334–367.

<sup>10</sup> See Matthew Kieran, 'The Fragility of Aesthetic Knowledge: Aesthetic Psychology and Aesthetic Virtues' in Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (eds), *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

## Artistic Skills and Values

A central aim of engaging with works as art is appreciation. But with respect to what? What features and values should we seek to refine our appreciation of? How should we judge the value of works?

Aestheticism focuses on what seems to be distinctive of art. Appreciating works as art is held to concern aesthetic features such as elegance, grace, beauty and the formal treatment of a theme.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, some hold that there are very general aesthetic criteria which govern the value of all works, such as how a work's lower level features combine to give a work its overall unity, complexity and intensity.<sup>12</sup> On this view to appreciate a work as art is not to appreciate it for any insight, knowledge or capacity to teach that it may afford. This is not to claim that the content of a work is irrelevant to its artistic value. It is just that a work's content is relevant *only* in so far as it indirectly impacts upon the work's aesthetic character. Thus, strictly speaking, whether or not Picasso's *Weeping Woman* conveys putative insights into the nature of vicious grief or *King Lear* shows us the folly of parental egoism is neither here nor there. The thematic content of such works is held to be relevant only in so far as the raw material of abiding human interest is artistically worked up into a coherent, unified and harmonious thematic exploration. Aestheticists can acknowledge that artworks may convey insight, but as such this is held to be irrelevant to a work's value as art. It is worth noting though that some aestheticists go so far as denying that artworks can convey worthwhile insights. Where we seek knowledge, justification is required. The aesthete's thought here is that works as art cannot provide justification for the claims they make.<sup>13</sup> We must look elsewhere, it is claimed, to history, science or actual human experience, to see whether grief really can be vicious or egoistic pride corrode familial relations.

Aestheticism is not without its attractions. It provides an answer to the problem of instrumentalization by conceiving of the value of art in distinctive terms i.e. its aesthetic aspect. It also gives an explanation,

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Peter Lamarque and Stein Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Nick Zangwill, 'Moderate Aesthetic Formalism', *Philosophical Quarterly* **50**, 201, (2000), 476–493.

<sup>12</sup> Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958).

<sup>13</sup> Jerome Stolnitz, 'On the Cognitive Triviality of Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, **32**, 3 (1992), 191–200.

## Matthew Kieran

amongst other things, as to how and why we can appreciate works we vehemently disagree with. Yet it is an overly narrow conception of artistic values that remains inadequate to how we appreciate art.

First, consider the fact that we often appreciate artworks due to how they engage and exercise our discriminatory skills or capacities.<sup>14</sup> Chardin's *Boy Playing Cards* might not look much at first. Yet it repays close visual attention. We have a wide on view of a boy seated at a card table, cards in hand. The whiteness of the cards, the cuffs of the boy's shirt and collar, set up certain triangular visual relationships. The effect is to heighten a sense of depth in the pictorial space whilst simultaneously foregrounding the canvas's flatness. It is a subtle demonstration of artistic skill that draws in and exercises the viewer's visual skills. Once we start to notice the whiteness of the collar, our eyes are drawn down toward the cuffs, which have a triangular relationship to the cards in the boy's hand. The cards in hand also have a triangular relationship to those laid out on the table. Finally, the cards laid out on the table and the cards in hand form the base points of a triangle, the apex of which is the card sitting at the very front tucked in a table drawer. This in turn serves to emphasise the flatness of the canvas, against the background structure of visual relationships which heighten the sense of pictorial depth. Chardin's painting flatters viewers with respect to their visual skills whilst simultaneously subtly flaunting its pictorial artistry. In doing so the painting speaks to a particular kind of appreciative engagement that draws on and cultivates skills (in this instance visual ones).

The point holds just as well for cognitive-affective skills as it does for sensory ones. Consider Picasso's *Weeping Woman* once more. It may be that we have never felt such a vicious form of grief nor seen others possessed by it. Yet we see the woman's finger's depicted as angularly slashing across her face, an acidic tear drop gouging the cheek. The deployment of such visual devices cultivates the viewer's ability to discriminate amongst a range of emotional states. We might, after all, now recognise viciousness in grief where we had been blind to the possibility before. Thus it is across a myriad of art forms from visual art to

<sup>14</sup> See Matthew Kieran, *Revealing Art* (London: Routledge, 2004), 138–147. The idea is that when Ernst Gombrich, in *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon, 1960), focuses on appreciating visual schemas or James Wood, in *How Fiction Works* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), highlights fictional techniques which draw on seeing the world from another's point of view, we should think of these as the exercise of mental skills.



music or literature. We often appreciate works in terms of the exercise of discriminative capacities and skills, many of which are not concerned with aesthetic qualities whatsoever. Indeed it is through exercising them in appreciation that we come to cultivate and refine them.

Second, works as art often embody putative insights and solicit emotional responses us. Artworks can manifest attitudes and seek assent from us in so doing. Where an attitude is manifest, and deployed via artistic means, it is potentially up for evaluation in a way that can be directly relevant to a work's artistic value. Whether the attitudes sought are justified or not often should affect our appreciation and evaluation of works as art. Consider George Orwell's *1984*. The novel's literary power partly rests upon the dissection of totalitarianism as the pursuit of power for its own sake alongside the concomitant obliteration of individual intimacy. This is precisely what is so deeply horrifying when reading the novel. Now, as the aestheticist insists, part of the literary value does inhere in how the themes are explored. Winston's spiritual annihilation is a fittingly horrifying crescendo to the novel. It is the dramatic culmination of a psychological unease initiated from the very first opening lines:

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.<sup>15</sup>

Yet the novel is making truth claims (e.g. about the nature of totalitarianism) and seeks assent from the reader toward certain attitudes. We are supposed to be horrified at the prospect of such a state and this is justified. Why? The nature of totalitarianism, as the novel prescribes us to understand it, is such that it seeks to preclude autonomy, genuine intimacy and trust in others. If the novel were a misrepresentation of totalitarianism, the attitudes it seeks from the reader would not be justified. It would not be such a great novel. What makes the attitudes relevant to the novel's value as literature is that they are conveyed to us via literary means and are central to the novel's purposes. The reader might notice, for example, the irony that Winston's minor individual vices, the gin and Victory cigarettes, have been designated for him. We might pick up on how the Party is represented as being just as obsessed with controlling the physical (watching people's faces, compulsory exercises, gruelling work) as it is with controlling the mind (Doublethink, Thoughtcrime). The literary workings are designed to

<sup>15</sup> George Orwell, *1984* (London: Penguin, [1949] 1989), 3.

get us to apprehend, through prescribing and prompting our imaginative experiences, how and why totalitarianism works as it does. The artistry is designed to shape our attention and responses in ways that render the putative insights relevant to the work's value as art.<sup>16</sup>

The trouble with aestheticism is that it conflates the distinctiveness of art with the values of art. Beauty and aesthetic features more generally are relevant to artistic value, just not exclusively so. Yet we can and should appreciate many works in terms of the sensory, emotional or cognitive skills they call upon us to exercise. Moreover, we should appreciate many works in terms of the putative insights proffered and attitudes endorsed. Hence we are right to evaluate some works in terms of their profundity or depth and damn others for their shallowness. If we are true to the myriad ways in which art works can be valuable, then we should recognize we often appreciate works in terms of their profundity, coherence, complexity, consistency, richness, depth and intelligibility. This is not to say that works cannot be good or great yet mistaken. After all, a work may be profound, yet mistaken, true to life or insightful, yet partial.

Given that insight and the appropriateness of solicited attitudes are often part of appreciation, it follows that the moral character of artworks is often relevant to artistic value. Yet it does not follow, as some have argued, that where a work commends that which should be morally condemned, this is automatically a defect in the work as art. Moralists would have us believe that failures in moral characterization or the solicitation of attitudes that are morally problematic *always* diminishes artistic value.<sup>17</sup> Whilst this may be true some of the time, it fails as a general claim. We commonly engage with works in order to suspend some of our moral commitments and explore different aspects of our intuitions and norms.<sup>18</sup> We appreciate the *Iliad*, *The Sagas of Icelanders* or Clint Eastwood Westerns partly because exploring honour codes involves attitudes and responses very different from ones we might sign up to in real life. Appreciating art

<sup>16</sup> See Berys Gaut, 'Art and Knowledge' in Jerrold Levinson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 436–450, and Matthew Kieran, *Revealing Art* (London: Routledge, 2004), 148–204.

<sup>17</sup> See Berys Gaut *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007) for defence of this claim and Noel Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Part IV, for inter-related essays defending a more moderate moralism.

<sup>18</sup> See Matthew Kieran, 'Emotions, Art, and Immorality' in Peter Goldie (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 681–704.

works often involves a suspension of judgement. We allow some of our real life attitudes or values to be isolated, set aside or reconfigured. This is often a matter of bracketing off ways in which we normally would respond to imaginatively explore different ways of seeing, feeling, responding to and valuing the world. Our imaginative engagement with art works, as with imaginative dreams, fantasies and explorations, is much more complex than moralist critics allow. Whilst it is often the case that a work's morally good character contributes to its artistic value, nonetheless, at least sometimes, for principled reasons, the morally problematic character of a work can positively contribute to its artistic value.

### Appreciative Vices and Virtues

Artistic appreciation involves the exercise of skill in apprehending aesthetic qualities, artistic originality, emotional expression, insight and moral understanding. Thus the development and refinement of artistic appreciation is an achievement. What kind of achievement? According to Hume we require something like delicacy of imagination, good sense, comparative experience, practice and freedom from prejudice. Why might this be? Experience is required in order to exercise and develop our discriminative skills. Comparative experiences enable us to compare and contrast different kinds of cases; if you want to know which beer to drink, best not to ask someone who has never drunk beer or only ever drunk Carlsberg. Freedom from prejudice and the dictates of fashion allows for the critical sympathy to appreciate what it is that an artist is trying to do. Delicacy of imagination may be required to pick up on subtle artistic devices, provide rich imaginative experiences and discrimination in our empathetic or sympathetic responses. Good sense might underwrite when it is appropriate to empathise, a grasp of what to take seriously in a work and what to consider irrelevant.

The importance of such requirements is reinforced if we recognize that appreciation and judgement often goes awry due to factors we are often unaware of. A host of recent experiments in psychology suggest that we are more susceptible to certain kinds of errors than we like to think. To take one example subjects at MIT were offered free cups of coffee in return for filling in a questionnaire.<sup>19</sup> After picking the

<sup>19</sup> Marco Bertini, Eliie Ofek and Dan Ariely, 'The Impact of Add-On Features on Consumer Product Evaluations', *Journal of Consumer Research*, **36**, 1, (2009), 17–28.

coffee up, subjects were pointed toward a table with coffee additives (e.g. milk, sugar) alongside more unusual condiments (e.g. cloves, orange peel). After helping themselves to whatever they fancied to go with the coffee, subjects were then asked to fill out the survey. Questions asked included, amongst other things, how much subjects liked the coffee, whether they would buy it in future and how much they would be prepared to pay for it. Over the next few days the experimental set up altered the condiment containers. Sometimes the condiments were in elegant metal and glass containers, whilst at other times they were in jagged Styrofoam cups. The coffee served throughout was exactly the same. Subjects rated the coffee much better when the condiments were in nice containers than when they were in the nasty ones. The phenomenon the coffee experiment points to is not an isolated one and it keeps cropping up in matters of taste and artistic judgement.

In one experiment students at Cornell were asked to rate pairs of Impressionist paintings.<sup>20</sup> The images in each pair were by the same artist (e.g. Monet, Renoir, Degas), depicted very similar scenes and painted around the same time (within two years). The students tended to prefer the more commonly reproduced Impressionist paintings (e.g. in Cornell University art books) over the more rarely produced ones. This may seem unsurprising given the assumption that the more widely reproduced Impressionist paintings tend to be the better art works. All the students are doing, we might think, is picking out the better works. However, over a number of classes an experimental group was then exposed to all the images, with the more widely reproduced paintings in each pair being exposed far less often than the more widely reproduced ones (in a ratio of 1:4). When the course finished the students in this group were also asked to rate the image pairs. The result was that preference for the more widely reproduced works disappeared in the experimental group. The study concludes that mere exposure to works may explain our preferences much more than we like to think. Whilst the results are not at issue, the interpretation is controversial. It could be, for example, that it is not just exposure that is doing the work but, rather, that increased exposure leads to enhanced appreciation. Even the less widely reproduced works used in the study are pretty good. More generally, we might think that cost, social cache or frequent citation in certain contexts can be good indicators of quality. Nonetheless, the empirical studies are suggestive. It seems that

<sup>20</sup> James Cutting, 'Gustave Caillebotte, French impressionism, and mere exposure', *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* **10**, 2 (2003), 319–343.

sometimes we conflate the pleasures deriving from appreciation with pleasures derived from sources such as familiarity, cost or status. Indeed it is often much more opaque to us why we like what we do than is commonly presumed. This might tempt some toward scepticism about artistic appreciation. Yet it should be no surprise to learn that naïve appreciators are more susceptible than those with greater expertise to all sorts of aesthetically irrelevant causal factors.<sup>21</sup>

What Hume failed to emphasise is that it is not just skills and abilities that matter. What also matters is why we are motivated to appreciate the works we do and the subsequent kinds of considerations governing our appreciation and judgement. At this juncture it is worth reminding ourselves that only some reasons for artistic valuing count. The mere fact that a particular class likes something, that it is expensive, or popular, does not as such count towards a work's being valuable as art. This is not to deny that there may be all sorts of complex, indirect relations. In some cases that a particular group likes something or it is expensive may be some reason to think a work is good.<sup>22</sup> Rather, the point is, what *makes* a work good cannot consist in its costing a certain amount or possessing a certain social cache. Artistic appreciation and the art world are susceptible to exploitation for all sorts of social purposes. The assertion and maintenance of individual status within groups and in relation to other groups is a primary psychological drive. Indeed this is especially strong in societies where competition and self-expression are at a premium. Hence, to take one example, a key means for achieving social status is via snobbery and this is an appreciative vice that the aesthetic realm is particularly susceptible to.<sup>23</sup> Many people collect art in

<sup>21</sup> See Paul Hekkert and Piet C. W. van Wieringen, 'The impact of level of expertise on the evaluation of original and altered versions of post-impressionistic paintings' *Acta Psychologica*, **94**, 2 (1996), 117–131, and Marco A. Hann, S. Gerhard Dijkstra and Peter T. Dijkstra, 'Expert judgement versus public opinion', *Journal of Cultural Economics* **29**, (2005), 59–78.

<sup>22</sup> See Matthew Kieran, 'The Fragility of Aesthetic Knowledge: Aesthetic Psychology and Aesthetic Virtues' in Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (eds), *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Kieran, 'The Vice of Snobbery: Aesthetic Knowledge, Justification and Virtue in Art Appreciation'. *Philosophical Quarterly*, **60**, 239 (2010), 243–263. For more general virtue theoretic approaches see David M. Woodruff, 'A Virtue Theory of Aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, **35**, 3, (2001), 23–36, Peter Goldie, 'Virtues of Art and Human Well-Being', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, **82**, 1, 175–195, Dominic McIver Lopes, 'Virtues of Art: Good Taste' *Aristotelian Society*

order to belong to and be picked out as a certain kind of ‘superior’ person. It is also clear that snobbery plays a strong role in art world fashions and artistic criticism. It is not uncommon to read reviews of novels being dismissed as genre fiction as opposed to literary fiction (a distinction that arose for commercial reasons in the 1970s). Why is this relevant?

At least some of Hume’s characteristics make for good snobs (in the sense of being good at being snobbish) just as much as they make for good appreciators. Snobs are not always wrong and may often be right (perhaps the opera snob is right in claiming that musicals are an inferior art form). Nonetheless snobbish motivation explains how and why a snob’s artistic judgement will tend to be unreliable in certain ways. Where the drive to appear superior causally enters into and figures in the wrong sort of roles in appreciation, then the snob will be open to error in a way a virtuous appreciator would not be. Hence the snob will tend to rate something highly just because doing so tends to bring social distinction with it, thereby judging the value of a work according to an inappropriate standard. The social standard will lead the snob astray in judging art wherever social distinction pulls away from tracking artistic value. Furthermore even where snobs get things right they will often lack the right kind of appreciative achievement. It is one thing to judge that a work is good, it is another to appreciate a work appropriately. We are interested in artistic judgements, whether a work is good or not, how good or bad it is, but much of the time because what we are really interested in is appreciation. Given that the snob is concerned with saying the right sort of things only in order to enhance his social status then he may be unconcerned with appreciation or concerned with it only in so far as doing so may achieve the desired social marking. Hence a snob might make good judgements based on acquiring lots of knowledge about art, yet if it does not feed into and amplify his appreciation then something is amiss.

Snobbery is far from the only artistic and appreciative vice. Whilst aestheticism fails to give due recognition to the values of art, in some cases it may constitute an appreciative vice. Where aestheticism is the psychological disposition to respond to works only in terms of narrowly aesthetic appreciation as characterized above, it constitutes an inappropriate standard for the appreciation of many kinds of art works. Following inappropriate standards may constitute a failing

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*Supplementary Volume*, **82**, 1, 197–211, and Peter Goldie, ‘Virtues of Art’, *Philosophy Compass* **5**, 10, (2010), 830–9.

but it is not always a vice. After all, given where someone is coming from or the stage in aesthetic development doing so may be blameless. Yet where it constitutes a blameworthy aestheticisation of the emotional, cognitive and moral aspects of works, such a psychological disposition constitutes an appreciative vice. If anything like the above account of artistic values is on the right track, then aestheticism will tend toward the following kinds of appreciative errors.

Aestheticists will tend to over value some works where purely aesthetic criteria are applied to works that call for evaluation in cognitive or moral terms. To take an infamous example, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* is an aesthetically appealing film of the Nuremberg rallies. The power of beauty is utilized to solicit admiration from us toward Hitler and the Third Reich. The psychological type of aestheticist just characterized will tend to savour and value the film highly, due to its aesthetic features. Yet, in line with the argument above, the moral character of the work is relevant to its artistic value. We ought not to respond as solicited and thus the film's value as art is marred. The aestheticist should be troubled in her responses to the film where she is not. Hence the aestheticisation of relevant moral aspects of the film leads her to over value it.

An aestheticist may also tend to under appreciate certain works for similar reasons. An aesthete's appreciation of Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* would savour the quality of the writing, its allegorical nature and symbolic workings. However part of the point of the novel is bound up with the insight that life and art are not just a matter of aesthetic connoisseurship. Osmond is an arch collector of art, experiences and people. He reifies refined aesthetic appreciation. Nonetheless, Osmond's taste fails him because he is inclined to value aesthetic features in isolation from judgements of goodness. Ralph, the contrast to Osmond in the novel, professes to do so too; yet his coming to see that there is more to life and art than aesthetic connoisseurship marks the key difference. Thus Ralph comes to repent at having used Isobel for his own amusement, whereas Isobel is trapped in a marriage of her own making to Osmond who does not. Ironically the aestheticist may underappreciate such a work precisely because the insightfulness of the attitude explored is held to be beside the point. The point does not just apply to fine art but across a huge range of objects from furniture to architecture where functionality is important. A tendency to create and rate highly aesthetically appealing objects regardless of function is asking for trouble. Philippe Starck's iconic lemon squeezer may look supremely elegant but it is famously useless in fulfilling the function for which it was putatively designed. This is not to say that the philosophical position of

aestheticism as such leads to appreciative vice. It is to say, however, that where someone is disposed to respond just to the narrowly aesthetically appreciable features of works, and where this is blameworthy, it will constitute an appreciative vice where considerations of broader values are relevant to a work's value as art.

Appreciating the myriad motivations we have for appreciating art and how we can go awry is illuminating. We need to be aware of biases we may have and tendencies to confabulate for the purposes of self-aggrandizement. We need to ask ourselves whether we are striving to do justice to works and what our motivations in appreciation really are. Considering the role of motivation and character also promises to throw light on the excellences or virtue of character that may be required. Openness to experience is an important psychological trait and one that is closely associated with artistic interest and creativity.<sup>24</sup> It is easy to see why. After all, receptivity to new experiences looks like it is an appreciative virtue given the requirement of comparative experience adduce above. It also looks like it is closely related to other appreciative virtues such as curiosity and humility. Curiosity construed as involving something like a disposition to seek out new experiences or explore new possibilities is presumably what often leads artists to develop new styles or techniques and leads appreciators to exciting new discoveries. A taxonomy of appreciative virtues is beyond the scope of this paper but it is worth spending some time on what is perhaps the master artistic virtue: creativity.

What it is to be creative in a minimal sense may be to possess or manifest a capacity to create something new and valuable in a given domain. Yet there is a richer sense in which creativity draws on excellence of character.<sup>25</sup> The psychological literature here is suggestive (and vast). One classic experiment took 72 creative writing students and randomly assigned (under certain restrictions) each subject to one of three groups.<sup>26</sup> Subjects in the control group were asked to

<sup>24</sup> See Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, Stian Reimers, Anne Hsu and Gorkan Ahmetoglu, 'Who art thou? Personality predictors of artistic preferences in a large U.K. sample: The importance of openness', *British Journal of Psychology*, **100**, 3 (2009), 501–516.

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed elaboration see Matthew Kieran, 'Creativity as a Virtue of Character' in Scott Barry Kaufman and Elliot Samuel Paul (eds), *The Philosophy of Creativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>26</sup> Amabile, Teresa M. (1985), 'Motivation and Creativity: Effects of Motivational Orientation on Creative Writers,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **48** (2): 393–99, and Mary Ann Collins and Teresa M.



write a basic poem on the theme of snow, read a John Irving short story, and then write a second poem identical in format to the first on the theme of laughter. Subjects in the two experimental groups followed the same procedure, except that after reading the short story they were asked to read and rank order a list of reasons for writing. The list for one group consisted of intrinsic motivations for writing (e.g. self-expression, insight, word play) whilst the list for the other consisted of extrinsic motivations (e.g. financial gain, social approval, prospects for graduate school). As judged by 12 poets the group primed with extrinsic motivations produced the least creative work at the end.

Whilst there are competing explanations as to what is going on, nonetheless the empirical work is suggestive. Assuming something like equivalence in artistic skills and mastery, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation seem to make a significant difference as to how creatively subjects performed. Intrinsic motivation is the desire to participate in some creative activity for its own sake. Extrinsic motivation, by contrast, is to be motivated to make something which realizes the values of art in so far as doing so instrumentally realizes some further aimed for end (e.g. social status or wealth). Art works can be created, collected and valued for their commodity value. It is no accident that we often refer to the movie or music industry and visual art works can be traded in pretty much the same way one might trade in stocks and shares. Collecting particular artists, knowing certain dealers and moving in some art world circles can also confer social status. It is not as if this is only true with respect to the 'high' end of the art world. Our discourse about and identification with particular kinds of art (e.g. indie music), down to extolling or condemning the merits of certain bands is replete with social signals and uses. The art world and its products can and often are used, amongst other things, in the service of social dynamics, networking, group recognition, in and out group identification, conformity and individualization. There are a myriad of external ends and values that the production and appreciation of art works can serve, and these can play a significant motivational role.

Extrinsic motivation often explains why someone identifies aims and goals that are taken to be the easiest to address in order to lead most directly to the realization of whatever the aimed for goal is.

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Amabile (1999), 'Motivation and Creativity', in R. Sternberg (ed.), *Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 297–312.

## **Matthew Kieran**

Thus where creation is governed by extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation, someone is far less likely to be creative. Why? Where the governing motivation is not directed toward the intrinsic values but contingent extrinsic ones, and where the extrinsic values pull away from the internal ones, extrinsic motivation will be inimical to creativity. This is what the term 'sell out' often denotes.

Of course this need not always be so, since in certain environments extrinsic motivations can enhance rather than undermine creativity. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can go hand in hand and recognition sometimes does track artistic achievement. It is just that intrinsic motivation pushes an artist to create valuable works even where the different kinds of motivations come apart. It is also an achievement of character. To remain true to what is worth making and why, despite the lack of recognition or status, is praiseworthy. Hence the admiration that is due to artists such as Van Gogh or Gauguin. It is also admirable to remain true to intrinsic motivations in spite of flattery and popularity. Where previous work has proved successful, dealers and audiences often want more of the same. Hence successful artists are often tempted to go on repeating variations on the same theme despite diminishing returns. It can take courage to remain true to the intrinsic motivations an artist has for creating art. Intrinsic motivation is an excellence of character that is both praiseworthy and explains why artists may be more robustly creative across a range of situations than they would otherwise be.

### **A Way Forward**

An instrumentalized conception of the value of art does an injustice to the multiplicity of art forms and provides a hostage to fortune. Sport, conversation, study, gardening and mood enhancers might realize the instrumental ends supposedly promoted through art (and possibly much better). Aestheticism promises to resist an instrumentalized approach through focusing on the values distinctively realized through art. Yet the aesthete's conception of art leads to a false narrowing of the range of experiences and values artistic appreciation properly admits of. It is not just that skills are involved in artistic appreciation or that we should recognize a broad range of artistic values. Art exercises and cultivates valuable dispositions that include valuable excellences of character. Artistic courage or appreciative humility, curiosity and perseverance are feats of character worthy of praise and admiration. This is especially true given that it is all too easy to be prey to vices such as snobbery. Artistic virtues also explain how

we can come to create and appreciate all sorts of things from everyday food recipes to the finest artistic achievements of humankind. If we start to consider the character involved in appreciating and making art, rather than just focusing on judging the value of artworks, we may come to see a more robust way of resisting the temptation to instrumentalize the arts.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This is a version of my inaugural professorial lecture for the University of Leeds, Friday 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2010, and a public lecture in London for the Royal Institute of Philosophy, Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2010. Grateful acknowledgement is made to both audiences, including family, friends and esteemed colleagues, as well as the U.K. Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding research related to some of this work as part of the ‘Method in Philosophical Aesthetics: The Challenge from the Sciences’ project.