

Values of Beauty  
*Historical Essays in Aesthetics*

In *Values of Beauty*, Paul Guyer discusses major ideas and figures in the history of aesthetics from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. At the core of the book are Guyer's most recent essays on the epochal contribution of Immanuel Kant. The book sets Kant's work in the context of predecessors, contemporaries, and successors, including David Hume, Alexander Gerard, Archibald Alison, Arthur Schopenhauer, and John Stuart Mill.

All of the essays emphasize the complexity rather than the isolation of our aesthetic experience of both nature and art, and the interconnection of aesthetic values such as beauty and sublimity on the one hand and prudential and moral values on the other.

Guyer asserts that the idea of the freedom of the imagination as the key to both artistic creation and aesthetic experience has been a common thread throughout the modern history of aesthetics, although the freedom of the imagination has been understood and connected to other forms of freedom in many different ways.

Paul Guyer is Professor of Philosophy and Florence R. C. Murray Professor in the Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of five books on Kant, most recently *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*, and he is General Co-Editor of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, in which he has contributed to the translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and Kant's *Notes and Fragments*. He has received fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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PAUL GUYER  
*Florence R. C. Murray Professor in the Humanities  
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*For Stanley Cavell,  
an exemplar of originality*

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## Introduction

This volume collects a baker's dozen of my papers in the history of aesthetics. One was published in 1986 and one in 1993, but the rest have all been published or written since 1996. Three have not yet been published elsewhere.

Plato effectively began Western philosophy with an attack on Greek assumptions about the cognitive and practical value of the creation and experience of art, so aesthetics has been both a part of and under attack by philosophy since the outset. In the *Republic*, Plato questioned the claims of poets and their adherents to any important expertise, and cast doubt on the cognitive value of imitations or representations in general by characterizing them as mere copies of ordinary objects that are themselves mere copies of the genuine realities – the Forms. In the *Ion* and *Phaedrus*, he more archly cast doubt on any claims to knowledge that might be made by artists by suggesting that artistic success depends upon divine inspiration, and is therefore incomprehensible to mere mortals. In the *Republic*, he also questioned the practical value of art not only by questioning the cognitive claims on which its practical value might be thought to depend, but also by arguing that the expression of emotion in either the experience or especially the performance of art would be counterproductive for the education of his ideal guardians, who are to learn above all to use their reason to control their emotions, and by extension the emotions of those they are to govern. Yet while doing all of this, Plato was also aware of the spell of beauty, especially beauty in our own kind, and attempted to channel our love of earthly beauty into love of a higher kind of beauty, something not otherwise accessible to the senses,

the beauties of the Forms themselves, especially, of course, the Form of the Good or Justice.

Plato has subsequently found few takers for the whole of his critique of beauty and art; indeed, the defense of both the cognitive and the emotional as well as practical value of aesthetic experience began immediately with Aristotle, his student and successor. But the questions that Plato raised – what is the nature and value of beauty? what is the connection between art and knowledge? what is the connection between aesthetics and morality? and what is genius, the source of artistic inspiration? – have always remained at the heart of aesthetics, no less so when aesthetics became a recognized academic discipline early in the eighteenth century than before, and no less so now than at any other time in modernity. Indeed, after several decades in which “analytic” philosophers set these substantive issues aside in favor of supposedly more respectable as well as more tractable questions about the structure and logic of aesthetic language and discourse – just as they attempted to do for a while in other areas of philosophy as well, such as moral philosophy – precisely these ancient questions have recently returned to the forefront of debate in Anglo-American aesthetics, with all their allure and all their difficulty.

Among the liveliest issues in recent aesthetics have been questions about the importance of beauty, the cognitive significance of fictions, the links between aesthetics and morality, and even the nature of genius and artistic creation. The essays in this volume, although they directly engage ideas and figures from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, touch upon all of these issues. These essays discuss the sources of the value that we place on the experience of the beautiful, the sublime, and other aesthetic merits in both nature and art; how aesthetic values can be distinctive from and yet connected to and supportive of the range of values in our lives that we group under the rubric of the moral; conceptions of the creation of aesthetic values, traditionally discussed under the name of genius; and continuities between traditional and recent theories of beauty and of art in spite of drastic changes in the arts themselves between the beginning of the eighteenth century and the end of the twentieth. The figure of Kant is central to many of the essays and entirely absent from none of them, although the first two essays focus on writers before Kant and the last three on some successors to Kant, because in my opinion, Kant’s analyses of aesthetic experience, aesthetic creativity, and the connections between the aesthetic and the moral responded to the complexity of all of these in ways that ensure their continuing interest and fruitfulness.



Chapter 1, “The Origins of Modern Aesthetics: 1711–1735,” looks at alternative accounts of aesthetic pleasure in the foundational quarter-century of the discipline that was named by Alexander Baumgarten at its end. Here I consider the formalist account of beauty of the Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson (although their views are by no means identical), the account of aesthetic experience as controlled emotional arousal advocated by the Abbé Du Bos, and the cognitivist account of Baumgarten, and also suggest that Joseph Addison’s famous essays on “The Pleasures of the Imagination,” although in some ways they anticipate the associationism of subsequent British aesthetics, which would culminate in the work of Archibald Alison that is contrasted to Kant’s in Chapter 8, also recognize the complexity of the sources of those pleasures in a way that would not be seen again until Kant.

Chapter 2, “The Standard of Taste and the ‘Most Ardent Desire of Society,’” is an essay on Hume that I originally published in a Festschrift for Stanley Cavell in 1993. Cavell’s invocation of Kant in his early essay “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy” was certainly part of the inspiration for my dissertation on Kant’s approach to the problem of taste; the same essay includes a pregnant remark about Hume’s concept of the critic, which I take up in this chapter. The central question of this chapter is why we should care about the aesthetic preferences of others, even if they might be critics who are more learned and more practiced than ourselves. I argue that in his major works, Hume outlined a complex theory of beauty, on which we can take pleasure in many aspects of and associations with works of art that go far beyond their form, about which we can learn from critics both present and past; but Hume also recognized that we value the very fact of agreement with our fellows itself, and thus that the existence of a shared critical tradition in a community is an additional source of value in aesthetic experience. Hume’s analysis of taste thus suggests a complex analysis of the nature and conditions of community in general, therefore of the conditions for the possibility of human action and thus morality as well, which is surely what caught Cavell’s interest. The way in which an individual is part of a community by means of standards or criteria that both constrain how the individual can think and talk, yet must also be actively affirmed and developed by the individual, has been an issue throughout Cavell’s work, and indeed the presentation of a conception of the social contract, in response to Hume, that can serve as a model for the comprehension of human linguistic and cognitive interaction and community is the starting point of his magnum opus, *The Claim of Reason* (1979). Cavell does not

discuss Hume's essay "Of the Standard of Taste" there, but Cavellian issues about individual and community were in my mind as I wrote about Hume for Cavell. I am happy not merely to reprint this essay here but to dedicate the present volume to my teacher and friend of almost forty years.

The next eight essays focus mainly but not exclusively on Kant. Chapter 3, "The Harmony of the Faculties Revisited," addresses the central concept in Kant's account of our experience of both natural and artistic beauty, which is also the key to his model of how we can value such experience both for its own sake and also for its manifold moral significance. I argue for an interpretation of Kant's conception of the "free play" of imagination and understanding, or in the case of the sublime imagination, understanding and reason, which it is compatible with but goes beyond ordinary cognition and thus strikes us as an unexpected gift in addition to such cognition rather than as an alternative to it. Such a conception of the basis of aesthetic experience, I maintain, is necessary not only to make Kant's theory of the judgment of taste plausible – for after all, we are, indeed on Kant's own account in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, never simply devoid of knowledge in the experience of any object, objects of natural or artistic beauty or sublimity included – but it is also necessary to understand Kant's view of both the varieties of beauty and sublimity as well as the connections between aesthetic experience on the one hand and both cognition and morality on the other.

The variety of both the sources of aesthetic value themselves and of their connections to other forms of value are then explored in ensuing essays. In Chapters 4 and 5, I consider Kant's conception of "dependent" or "adherent" as contrasted with "free" beauty, first in the context of the eighteenth-century debate about the relation between beauty and utility from Shaftesbury through Burke (Chapter 4) and then in Kant alone (Chapter 5). In these two essays, I suggest that Kant, like many other eighteenth-century thinkers, recognized that the human concern for utility is just as natural and inescapable as the human desire for society as well as pleasure in pure form, and that it is therefore only natural – as well as entirely plausible – for him to think that the experience of the beauty of objects, again natural or artifactual, is not always or even usually an alternative to the appreciation of utility in them, but typically exists in interaction with the latter, indeed as Chapter 5 argues, in a variety of forms of interaction.

In Chapter 4, on beauty and utility, I show that whereas previous aestheticians tended to think that the value of beauty must lie either in pure form or in utility alone – a debate between Hutcheson and George

Berkeley, not otherwise known as an aesthetician, is illustrative here – and Hume reconciled these alternatives only superficially by simply supposing that there are two unrelated kinds of beauty, only Kant recognized the teleological character of human mentality, which leads us to make the satisfaction of utilitarian concerns in an object that we think ought to satisfy them a necessary condition for any further aesthetic satisfaction with the object. Indeed, I could have made explicit here that there is a parallel between Kant's general analysis of the harmony of the faculties and the special case of adherent beauty: just as any beautiful object must both satisfy the general conditions of cognition and also give us a sense of unity that goes beyond what is necessary to satisfy those requirements, so in the case of an object that has a readily recognizable purpose we must be able to see the object as satisfying its purpose before being able to take pleasure in the way that it goes beyond merely doing so. The “modest proposal” of Chapter 5 is then that the variety of interpretative approaches to Kant's concept of adherent beauty actually reflects the variety of ways in which purpose and form can interact to give us pleasure: in some cases, the object's satisfaction of its intended purpose may be just a necessary condition for our pleasure in its form; in some cases, our separate pleasures in the function and in the form of the object may be additive; and in some cases, we may take pleasure in a genuine interaction between function and form. But I also argue that such a *variety* of sources of pleasure should not be taken as a *scale* of pleasure and value; it does not automatically follow that a more complex pleasure is a more valuable pleasure. The value of any particular experience will no doubt have to be left to, well, experience.

I have also assumed, if not made as explicit as I might have, that there is a similar structure to Kant's thought about the relation between aesthetic and moral value: as the moral theorist he was, surely Kant must have assumed that the moral permissibility of the creation and the experience of any particular object in the actual circumstances of both that creation and experience is a necessary condition of our taking even a purely aesthetic pleasure in it, but that there is also a variety of ways in which aesthetic experiences may go beyond mere compatibility with morality to actually support it – without losing what makes them distinctively aesthetic. In any case, the complex relations that Kant recognizes to obtain between our appreciation of beauty and the demands of morality are the themes of the next group of essays.

In Chapter 6, “Kant on the Purity of the Ugly,” I argue that for Kant, a judgment of ugliness is not typically a purely aesthetic judgment, but

rather an expression of the sensible presentation of something that is physiologically, but even more typically morally, repulsive. Thus we cannot understand the full range of what we consider to be aesthetic judgments unless we are prepared to consider the complex relations between aesthetic and moral experience. So again we see that what we may tend to think of as the single category of the aesthetic thus includes a variety of values. Here I also argue that when Kant thinks about aesthetic pain rather than pleasure, he is thinking of the experience of the sublime rather than of the ugly, but that the experience of the sublime must also be thought of as a complex experience with both aesthetic and moral aspects. But that, I conclude, is no real objection to Kant's putting the experience of the sublime on the same plane as the experience of the beautiful, because even though Kant begins his analysis of beauty with the case of pure or unmixed beauty, in fact he recognizes that the vast majority of our actual experiences of beauty are complex experiences with both aesthetic and moral elements.

Indeed, what I argue in Chapter 7, "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality: Kant's Lectures on Anthropology and the Development of His Aesthetic Theory," is that although much of the structure of Kant's analysis of aesthetic experience and judgment had been in place since the mid-1770s, including his key ideas of the subjective origin yet intersubjective validity of judgments of taste in the free play of our cognitive powers, it was only when he finally saw how to relate the aesthetic to the moral without sacrificing what is essential to either that it suddenly became important and perhaps even possible for him to write a third critique in the brief period from 1788 to early 1790. Kant had long toyed with the idea of writing a critique of *taste* like dozens of his predecessors and contemporaries, but it was not until he saw how to write a critique of the power of *judgment* that could both differentiate and yet link aesthetic and moral judgment that the work finally had a uniquely Kantian *raison d'être*. Kant's discovery of parallels between the connection of aesthetic to moral judgment and the connection of teleological to moral judgment is also what accounts for his startling linkage of aesthetics and teleology in the third critique.

In Chapter 8, "The Ethical Value of the Aesthetic: Kant, Alison, and Santayana," I offer a systematic review of the complex of relations between the aesthetic and the moral that Kant recognized, but go beyond my previous work on this subject (the preceding two essays as well as those collected in my 1993 volume *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*) by contrasting Kant's views on this matter with those expressed by the Scot Archibald Alison in an exactly contemporaneous work, his *Essays on the*

*Nature and Principles of Taste* of 1790. I use Alison to point up something that is missing in Kant's theory, the real presence of emotion in aesthetic experience and its value for morality, indeed the presence of love in aesthetic experience, although Alison surely goes overboard in reducing every aspect of aesthetic experience to an emotional association. I therefore argue that some sort of synthesis between the two sorts of views is needed, and I suggest that such a synthesis is precisely what George Santayana provided a century later in *The Sense of Beauty* (1896). Santayana tried to disown this book as a product of his youth, and it has certainly been out of fashion lately, but I present it as a work of enduring interest that should be considered in the contemporary debates about the relations between aesthetics and cognition on the one hand and aesthetics and morality on the other. In particular, while many participants in this debate may assume that moral value is in some sense more fundamental than aesthetic value, and while Kant himself assumes that a good will is the only thing of unconditional value, thus that moral value is certainly a constraint upon if not the basis of all other sources of value, Santayana makes the contrasting suggestion that morality is in fact of merely instrumental value: its mission is merely to make it possible for people to enjoy that which is of positive value, such as the aesthetic itself. There is a striking parallel here between Santayana's *Sense of Beauty* and G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, although Moore's book appeared only seven years later than Santayana's; but I do not explore this parallel in the chapter.

Finally, in Chapter 9, "The Symbols of Freedom in Kant's Aesthetics," I further explore the relations between the beautiful and the sublime, also touched upon in Chapter 6, and in particular try to resolve the confusion that Kant creates when he suggests that *each* of these is the *only* paradigmatic aesthetic symbol of the moral. Obviously this cannot be quite right, so what I suggest is that our experiences of the beautiful and the sublime each symbolize different aspects of moral freedom: appealing to a distinction between negative and positive conceptions of freedom that Kant makes in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, I suggest that the sublime offers us a palpable experience of freedom negatively understood, that is, of our power of resistance to mere nature, while the beautiful offers us a symbolic representation of freedom understood positively, as something that can be achieved only through adherence to universally valid laws. Lying behind both of these connections, of course, is Kant's idea that we *need* sensible symbols of freedom and morality even though, as he puts it in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, we are supposed to be able to understand the demands of morality and prove our freedom to live up

to them as a pure “fact of reason.” This is not a paradox, however; I suggest throughout these essays that Kant’s recognition that we are *rational animals*, both sensible and embodied on the one hand and rational on the other, is the key to much of his thought, both within aesthetics and indeed without it.

Chapter 10, “Exemplary Originality: Genius, Universality, and Individuality,” turns to a subject that was of great interest to Kant’s predecessors as well as to his successors well into the twentieth century, namely, genius. Here I argue that Kant’s conception of this source of artistic production represents a significant departure from both preceding views, such as those of the Abbé Du Bos and Alexander Gerard, but also some succeeding views, such as those of Samuel Coleridge and Ralph Waldo Emerson: while those thinkers conceive of genius as primarily a special gift of *perception*, the ability to see more easily what is both there to be seen and what all can ultimately come to see, Kant treats genius as a power for the *creation* of aesthetic value, indeed of the creation of syntheses of aesthetic and moral value through “aesthetic ideas” – and thus introduces an idea of originality that is itself original. But even Kant may place too much value on the universal validity of originality – what he calls “exemplary originality” – so I turn to someone who usually does not get much attention in the historiography of aesthetics, namely, John Stuart Mill, for a model of how we can value originality and the diversity it creates while being part of a community, indeed a community that prizes intellectual – and ultimately other – forms of diversity.

The final three essays discuss one more nineteenth-century writer, Arthur Schopenhauer, and then three twentieth-century aestheticians, Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto, and Mary Mothersill. In Chapter 11, “Pleasure and Knowledge in Schopenhauer’s Aesthetics,” I argue that while Schopenhauer might seem to offer an entirely negative view of the moral value of aesthetic experience – the experience of beauty simply enables us to escape from the pains of ordinary existence for a time, just as the moral attitude of resignation enables us to escape from it for good – in fact he also recognized a positive pleasure in the exercise of our cognitive powers, indeed a pleasure in the perception through both natural and artistic beauty of what he called the “Platonic Ideas,” although these Ideas as Schopenhauer conceives them are diametrically opposed to the Forms as Plato conceived them – Schopenhauer’s Ideas are the paradigmatic forms of the realm of appearance, while Plato’s Forms are the ideas of a reality that transcends all appearance. (But while Schopenhauer is usually the first to tell us when he’s trying to be humorous or ironic,

maybe there's an irony in his choice of Plato's name for his own conception that for once he's subtle enough not to point out to us.) I also consider the charge that Schopenhauer is guilty of the cardinal sin of "aesthetic attitude" theorists, namely, allowing that if beauty is just a matter of how we approach an object, then we can make *any* object beautiful just by approaching it in the right frame of mind. That is supposed to be a self-evident knock-down objection to any theory of beauty, which should discriminate between what is beautiful and what is not; but for Schopenhauer, the idea that we might find beauty, and thus both positive pleasure and relief, in any object, is not a flaw but a virtue, although he also points out that it is not so easy to put ourselves into this frame of mind – indeed, we might just need a genius to show us how to find the beauty in an object where it is not immediately apparent.

In Chapter 12, "From Jupiter's Eagle to Warhol's Boxes: The Concept of Art from Kant to Danto," I argue that although the idea that art must ultimately be pleasurable has not been explicit in many recent theories, and indeed for many decades of the twentieth century it seemed as if beauty were simply irrelevant to art, Kantian assumptions in fact continue to play a major role in Monroe Beardsley's theory of beauty and even Arthur Danto's definition of art. Danto has certainly made much of how our image of the *objects* of art has undergone radical changes over the last century, but his own definition of art shows that we find many of the same values in our *experience* of art that our predecessors did. (In his 2003 book *The Abuse of Beauty*, Danto has acknowledged that beauty can be at least a possible if not a necessary aim of art; this too places him squarely in the tradition of modern aesthetic theory, if not exactly in the camp of Kant, then certainly in the camp of many like Addison and Gerard who recognized beauty as just one of the various "pleasures of the imagination" that may be found in our experience of art.)

Finally, Chapter 13 discusses Mary Mothersill's *Beauty Restored* (1984), a work that was willing to connect itself explicitly to some of the key figures of eighteenth-century aesthetics, and was perhaps the earliest of the recent attempts to restore credit to the value of beauty in our experience of art. Mothersill argues that we can indeed acknowledge a continuing *concept* of beauty even while our *conception* of what beautiful objects look like undergoes radical change, and thus that the value we find in beautiful objects need not undergo a revolution even while the objects themselves do. I think this point is a valuable accompaniment to the arguments of her long-time colleague Danto, and worth remembering. But I also suggest we might go further than Mothersill, and that both

producers and consumers of art might need not just a concept but also a theory of beauty, because even if we cannot *command* that others find the same things beautiful that we ourselves do, we are always *commending* what we find beautiful to each other, and this is not something we can responsibly do without having some well-grounded expectation that those to whom we commend the objects we have found beautiful may also do so, an expectation that we might well ground in a theory of beauty.

My final comments in this book thus once again suggest that there are inescapable connections between aesthetic and moral values, for that we make our aesthetic recommendations responsibly is itself a moral responsibility.



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## Abbreviations Used in the Text

Ak	Kant: <i>Gesammelte Schriften</i>
CPJ	Kant: <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i>
CPrR	Kant: <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>
DV	Kant: “Doctrine of Virtue” in <i>Metaphysics of Morals</i>
ENPT	Alison: <i>Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste</i>
EPM	Hume: An Essay Concerning the Principles of Morals
FI	Kant: “First Introduction” to <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i>
G	Kant: <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
I	Hutcheson: <i>An Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue</i>
SB	Santayana: <i>The Sense of Beauty</i>
ST	Hume: “Of the Standard of Taste”
T	Hume: <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i>
WWR	Schopenhauer: <i>The World as Will and Representation</i>