



What is meant by the term
'aesthetic property'?

DEREK MATRAVERS (PARIS, OCTOBER 2022)

The structure of the talk

- ▶ The 'narrow question'
 - ▶ Aesthetic properties are part of the explanation of what connects experience and judgement. What should be included?
- ▶ The 'broad question'
 - ▶ Are aesthetic properties are part of the explanation of social behaviour or are they part of the explanation of what connects experience and judgement? Or both?

The 'narrow question'

- ▶ Frank Sibley
 - ▶ A list of words: 'unified, balanced, integrated, lifeless, serene, sombre, dynamic, powerful, vivid, delicate, moving, trite, sentimental, tragic.'
 - ▶ The claim that detecting aesthetic properties 'requires the exercise of taste, perceptiveness, or sensitivity.'

Finding a definition

- ▶ Need to find an intuitive intension to match an intuitive extension. That is, we need to find a meaning that covers all and only the correct use of the term.
- ▶ But that means we need agreement on the correct use of the term.
- ▶ Kant claims that, for all of these properties, some think they are aesthetic properties when they are not on Kant's theory: 'purely sensory properties', 'geometrically regular figures', 'the English taste in gardens', 'the baroque taste in furniture', 'everything that shows stiff regularity', 'human song', and 'the changing shapes of the flames in a fireplace or a rippling brook'

Malcolm Budd

- ▶ 'Any attempt to articulate the essence of the aesthetic runs up against the problematic scope of the aesthetic. For there are difference conceptions of its scope, no one of which has a proper claim to be the right one.' (33)
- ▶ 'Consider purely sensory (or sensuous) pleasure. The crucial feature of purely sensory pleasure, understood as pleasure in the perception of a single undifferentiated colour expanse, as such or in the perception of a sound of a constant pitch, loudness, and timbre or a taste or smell in which a single sensory quality, sweetness, or acidity, for example, is detected, is that there is no variety in the object as it is perceived, just a single, structureless, homogeneous quality.' (34)

What makes a set of things picked out an interesting set of things?

- Function:
 - Do all the elements of the set have a common function?
- Epistemology:
 - Do we come to know about each element in the set in the same (or similar) way?
- Phenomenology:
 - Do the elements in the set share a phenomenology?

Budd's definition

- ▶ 'An aesthetic property of an item is any relation among the elements or any higher-order property of it that, as realised in the item, is fit to make the perception or imaginative realisation of it intrinsically rewarding.' (47)
- ▶ Is it interesting?
- ▶ Function
 - ▶ All the elements in Budd's set have a common function: namely, the perception or imaginative realisation of them is intrinsically rewarding.
- ▶ Epistemology
 - ▶ Budd thinks we require 'taste' (or an 'aesthetic attitude') to pick out aesthetic properties as aesthetic properties.
- ▶ Phenomenology
 - ▶ Budd's view is that there is no unified phenomenology: aesthetic properties are *either* perceived or imaginatively realised.

Concluding the discussion of 'the narrow view'

- ▶ Budd has given us a robust and defensible account of what it is to be an aesthetic property.
- ▶ Sensory properties are not aesthetic properties when we experience them merely as such.

The 'broad question'

- ▶ Lopes: 'An aesthetic property, V , is reason giving = the fact that x is V lends weight to the proposition that it would be an aesthetic achievement for some A to ϕ in C , where x is an item in an aesthetic practice, K , and A 's competence to ϕ is aligned upon K 's aesthetic profile.' (127)
- ▶ 'X is an aesthetic property if x is such that it would be a reason for someone who is within an aesthetic practice, to act within that practice.'

The 'broad question'

- ▶ Nick Riggle: 'The communitarian insists that I ought to live my aesthetic life in certain ways because and only because there is something we are doing in our aesthetic life, or because there is something our aesthetic life is doing for us. In one way or another, the communitarian stresses that we should not see aesthetic life as something individuals primarily have or that fundamentally benefits individuals. As a result, the aesthetic lives of others are not foreign lives with which we have little to no reason to engage. Aesthetic life is something we have but also something we have to continually create and sustain by exercising aesthetic sensibility in our judgments, our creative activities, and in our invitations to joint activity and appreciation. For the aesthetic communitarian, aesthetic life is deeply other-regarding and other concerning.' (24)

The 'broad question'

- ▶ 'Schematically, aesthetic life is worth living because it brings us *communal goods* that we cannot get without it. We can define *the practice of aesthetic valuing*, as a practice structured by these goods. Aesthetic value is then defined as whatever plays a certain role in the practice of aesthetic valuing—it is whatever is *worthy* of the practice of aesthetic valuing. To fill this in is to offer specific communitarian theories of aesthetic value, focused on specific goods.' (25)
- ▶ X is an aesthetic property if x is such that it would be a reason for someone to act in an aesthetic practice so as to bring about communal (aesthetic) goods.

Three putative extensions

- ▶ Budd: The term picks out those properties that play a specific role in explaining the link between individual aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment.
- ▶ Lopes: The term picks out those properties that play a specific role in explaining action in aesthetic practices (very broadly construed).
- ▶ Riggle: The term picks out those properties that play a specific role in explaining action in aesthetic practices (very broadly construed) so as to bring about aesthetic communal goods.

Lopes and Budd, rather than Riggle

- Budd has picked out a coherent/unified/interesting set of properties that has a significant role in the practice of experiencing and then judging art.
- Lopes has picked out a coherent/unified/interesting set of properties that has a significant role in explaining aesthetic practices generally, one of which will be the practice of experiencing and then judging art.
- The moral: reject Riggle. Keep Lopes but the 'social turn' in aesthetics might not be as significant as it appears.