Chapter Two. Understanding the Aesthetic

As a domain of normative experience, the aesthetic has a powerful and pervasive presence in the human world. This book's central purpose is to reveal that presence and to explore how the aesthetic is incorporated in the texture of the world. Further, by recognizing the profound implications and the transformative possibilities of the aesthetic, we can help shape that world to make our place in it more generous and fulfilling. This may sound both presumptuous as well as opaque but, as we proceed, I hope that the deep and penetrating significance of the aesthetic will become both lucid and inevitable.

Let me begin this chapter by considering the aesthetic, not so much as the central influence in the methodological procedures that will guide this inquiry, but rather by developing its place in our concerns in the human world. To do this I need to develop still further some of the distinctive features of the aesthetic. But at the same time it is important to expose some of the misconceptions that discolor the term. Most significant of all is to recognize that the aesthetic stands as a source of value and a factor in judgment, and that these underlie its power as a social instrument. How such

value occurs and can be applied, the final topic of this chapter, will bring us still closer to the central concerns of the book.

Traditional Preconceptions and the Axioms of Aesthetics

I want to start by brushing aside some of what Francis Bacon called “reasoners,” who resemble spiders and "make cobwebs out of their own substance."[1] These have gravely misunderstood the aesthetic as well as much else in human experience. Aided by tendentious misreadings, the force of the aesthetic has been dammed up and its influence channelled so as to flow only within carefully constructed banks. To begin, let me indicate where these channels lie and then proceed to re-direct their course and flatten their banks.

Two common constrictions impede the Western understanding of the aesthetic (apart from its appropriation by the body-care industry). The first is the misguided idea that aesthetics concerns only the fine arts and the beauty of nature. The second impediment is the presumption that to call something aesthetic is to honor it. Both of these conventional misunderstandings unnecessarily restrict the applicability the aesthetic, diminish its vitality, and largely divest it of its profound normative power. These are strong claims and it will take the considerations that follow to give them body and life.

We have seen how, in the eighteenth century, aesthetics as a field of scholarly inquiry attracted attention and acquired a distinct identity. During the same period, the idea of art, in a complementary development, became increasingly focused on five predominately visual arts: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry. These were considered the major arts, the "fine" arts, and they represented the noblest human achievements. Other arts were also recognized, such as dance, theater, prose literature, and garden and landscape design, but these five were taken to embody beauty in its purest form as the distinctive achievement of civilization.[2] It is still common to honor these arts as "high," while the term 'fine art' commonly denotes the visual arts alone. Placing these five arts at the pinnacle shaped the landscape of aesthetics and carried with it consequences that were liberating at first but soon proved problematic. It will be useful to consider some of these consequences, but first, however, its strengths.

One effect of this way of ordering the arts was to institute a protective barrier between these arts and certain others considered primarily practical, such as garden design, weaving, basketry, and pottery. Like the fine arts, these require considerable skill combined with creative invention, and this leads to the enjoyment of them for their own sakes. What sullies their purity, however, is their inseparable bond with practical concerns. For in this tradition beauty was commonly idealized and considered incompatible with use, and it is the fact of their utility that separates these practical arts

from the realm of pure art. The sense of art as skill, a meaning found in the etymology of the term,[3] relates these useful arts to the fine arts, but many today still hold that their utility is a distraction from the pure contemplation of beauty.

This deep-seated prejudice against the aesthetic worth of the "practical" arts has Classical Greek roots in the essentially class-based distinction between theoretical knowledge (*theōria*) and practical knowledge (*phronēsis*). The first is enjoyed in pure, detached contemplation while *phronēsis* is exhibited in action. This is one of the most deep-seated distinctions in philosophy and carries profound social and cultural implications as well as aesthetic ones. For here lies the origin of the difference held to exist not only between the fine and the practical arts, between beauty and use, but between intellectual and manual labor, theory and practice, white collar and blue collar jobs, and the like. The fine arts require detached contemplation and are bound up with the senses that seem to thrive on such receptivity. Thus, of a piece with that distinction, it has been held traditionally that the proper aesthetic senses are the distal senses of sight and hearing, whereas the proximal senses of touch, smell, and taste – the bodily senses that are central to the practical arts -- have been excluded because they presumably impede the contemplative detachment required for aesthetic enjoyment.[4]

It is essential to note, however, that the difference does not lie so much in the experience as in the implicit value judgment that raises contemplative over practical knowledge and is applied here to categorize sensory experience. Thus the fine arts and natural beauty are elevated over practical, utilitarian, and functional considerations so that only those arts and nature may enter the domain of the aesthetic. This restriction, one might remark facetiously, turns the aesthetic appreciation of art and nature into a spectator sport. It is the first of several constraints imposed on the aesthetic by conventional wisdom. And the judgment then applied to the senses that raises sight and hearing over the contact senses leads us to a second limitation.

Another restriction that emerged in traditional aesthetics is expressed in the common tendency to think that calling something aesthetic is to praise it. 'Aesthetic,' then, is taken as virtually synonymous with beauty. To show why this unduly narrows the meaning of aesthetics and is misleading, let me return to the meaning of the concept.

As we have seen, the concept ‘aesthetics’ derives from the Greek *aisthēsis (αίσθησις),* literally, perception by the senses, and was introduced by Baumgarten to name the science of sensory knowledge that is directed toward beauty. On this reading, art epitomizes sense perception as the perfection of sensory awareness. I find

the perennial center of the meaning of 'aesthetics' in its etymology, and it can serve as a key to unlock a central domain of experience. Perhaps, indeed, the word 'aesthetics' is easily associated with the arts because of its ability to bring the arts into focus, as it were, sharper and clearer. Its etymology, "what is perceived by the senses," is embodied in the history of the arts and points clearly to what we may call primary experience, experience that is a direct, immediate, and pure form of perceptual apprehension. [5]

Each of these characteristics of aesthetic apprehension must be specified, and one of the purposes of this chapter is to examine such aspects of its meaning. But I shall do this gradually so that its richness can unfold freely. At this point it is clear that to identify an experience as sensory should say nothing in its favor or disfavor: it is entirely neutral. Sensory experience may be hurtful or harmful, as well as enriching or exhilarating. And it may merely offer perceptual information. It is simply experience in which sensory input is central, even though, as we have noted, sensation is always affected by variable factors – biological, social, cultural, and historical. Therefore, by keeping close to this source of its meaning, we can speak of the sense experience to which the aesthetic refers without ascribing any value, whether positive or negative, to whatever is termed “aesthetic.”

Finally, there is nothing sacred in the terms ‘aesthetic’ or 'aesthetics.' As concepts they have no ontological or normative status. Like all the words in a language, their meaning is specified only internally, within a language system, as Ferdinand de Saussure made clear. I make no claim, therefore, for any universal and unchanging truth located in the aesthetic, but I find the term useful as a vehicle for drawing our attention to what holds for all humankind-- the capacity for perceptual experience, experience whose full range and shadings are realized only rarely. I speak of perception rather than sensation because, as we must constantly remind ourselves, perception incorporates more than sensory experience. It is sensation mediated, quantified, apprehended, and shaped by psychological and cultural characteristics and patterns of apprehension, and by the multitude of forces that are part of everyone's world. The expression 'sense perception,' then, denotes the sensory aspect of perception, the central character of a collection of such influences. But let us now return to the aesthetic in its etymological and historical signification.

Aesthetic experience

Experience is central to the meaning of the aesthetic, not only from the origin of the word but because of its content and significance. At its simplest and most direct, we may have aesthetic experience in the pure sensuous delight of gazing at a lone trillium blooming amid the leafy debris of a woodland in spring. Aesthetic experience can refer

to the feelings of uplift and wonder when we marvel at the ever unique cloud streaks and shapes in the sky, regardless of whether they seem to resemble a basket of washing or can be accounted for by a meteorological explanation.[6] Here, too, one might place the mysterious contact with Rembrandt in one of his late self-portraits or the shiver of delight from the dramatic sequence of broken octaves in the solo violin in the first movement of the Brahms Concerto. Aesthetic experience encompasses our unending wonder at the beauty of nature and our awe of the power of the arts to penetrate deep into our emotional lives, encounters that lie at the high point of aesthetic value. At the same time experiencing the aesthetic can make us aware of the delights of ordinary life that may hold our pure attention for a moment – the glint of sunlight on spring leaves, the full moon rising above the horizon at dusk, a child's ingenuous smile. In all such things the force of the aesthetic lies in its capacity for distinctive perceptual experience.

In one way or another, every attempt to explain the aesthetic, every theory of the arts or of values in nature, must take stock of experience, experience that encompasses imaginative as well as actual perception. And it is not uncommon for aesthetic theory to acknowledge this, from Kant's transcendental aesthetic, in which knowledge rests on the capacity for experience[7] and flowers in his critique of aesthetic judgment, to Dewey's development of an aesthetic theory from an inquiry into experience that, at the same time, focuses his entire philosophical vision. As experience is necessary for

many forms of knowledge, so it is necessary for the aesthetic. And as the aesthetic exceeds the limits of cognitive knowing and grasps the very heart of experience, it may be considered all the more essential. How, then, to characterize aesthetic experience? This is the point from which all theoretical paths diverge.

To give a full account of the many directions in which they lead and to explore the attempts to describe and justify their legitimacy would require an exhaustive study of its own, and that is not my purpose here. Indeed, a clear insight lies behind the vision of the aesthetic that guides this book. Its central, distinguishing features can be described in brief and can be contrasted with some other influential views. This is what I want to do at the present stage of my inquiry. An inclusive understanding of aesthetic experience, one that takes account of its fullness, its ramifications, and its implications, is best built up out of the specific issues, particular cases, and examples that will appear as this we proceed. That is where we can hope to locate its critical features. It is not question of definition as much as a quest for elaboration.

Underlying most accounts of aesthetic experience lies an idea endemic in Western civilization, the view that sets consciousness apart from nature. Appearing in Plato, incorporated into scholastic theology, assuming many guises and penetrating deeply into Western cultural belief systems, this idea reached its clearest, its classical formulation, in Descartes' dualism of mind and body, and it continues to pervade

contemporary thought. Often challenged, this fundamental understanding is difficult to circumvent for, as a central ideological premise of Western philosophy, it undergoes many mutations and continues to reveal its presence in diverse disciplines and in theoretical accounts of all sorts. Few thinkers have been able to free themselves from its grasp.

In aesthetics, Cartesian dualism occurs in the common way of speaking of appreciation as the subjective experience of a work of art, in thinking of the work of art as a separate object to which we must direct our appreciative contemplation. It is manifested in the appreciation of natural beauty as an inner joy or an overwhelming feeling when one's "heart leaps up" on beholding a towering mountain, a tree that bears the scars of wind and weather, a spring flower, or "a rainbow in the sky." It underlay Kant's recognition of the subjectivity of the judgment of taste, ”the feeling of pleasure and pain, by which nothing in the object is signified, but through which there is a feeling in the subject as it is affected by the representation." And it lay behind Kant's unsuccessful attempt to surpass such subjectivity by insisting on the necessity of attaining universality. [8]

Traditional aesthetic theory is nonetheless bound by the same difficulty in relating subjective experience to an external object that Descartes encountered in attempting to

regain the “external” world. We have had theories that endeavor to correlate emotion, when it becomes aesthetic, with formal qualities. We have seen the widespread, manifestly subjective accounts of appreciation based on what is termed the aesthetic attitude, a distinctive attitude of contemplative detachment, of aesthetic disinterestedness still considered essential by many for the kind of appreciation appropriate to the arts. All such attitude theories resolve into psychological ones where it is considered necessary to adopt a mental set, a state of mind, so to say, in relation to what is variously called the work of art, the artwork, or the aesthetic object, in order that appreciation that is distinctively aesthetic take place. We find it in recent variations of social-psychologistic thinking as institutional theory in which the art status of a presumably aesthetic object is decided by the art public's acceptance. This resembles the view that what determines when something is a work of art and not a "mere real thing" is someone's declaring that it is and acting as if it were. This last case, Danto's well-known philosophical conundrum, rests on the double, perhaps even treble, division into reality, imitative works of art, and non-imitative, indiscernible actual objects whose meanings are presumably decidable by intuition, by a theory of art, by some other belief system held by a separate knower or appreciator, or by the conventions of the art public. In ways from naïve to sophisticated, this dualism endemic to Western culture persists, and it is difficult, for some perhaps impossible, to seriously question its ontological frame.

Of course there have been daring thinkers who challenged this metaphysic, most notably Spinoza, whose understanding of ontological unity remains a lonely but steadfast beacon to those who share his clarity and independence. But few others after this flash of brilliance in the seventeenth century have been illuminated by it. Among the most original and influential in recent times have been John Dewey and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics of experience locates the human as part of an all-inclusive natural world, engaged in a continuous activity of "doing and undergoing" in constant transaction with the conditions of the natural and social environment. Merleau-Ponty, coming from the very different French cultural-philosophical tradition whose pervasive Cartesianism seems to make any alternative inconceivable, persevered in an independent course by giving phenomenology an existential cast. This led him to discern a perceptual continuity in "the flesh of the world" joining both "seer" and "seen," touching and the touched, a continuity that exemplifies a "reversibility" in perception. Merleau-Ponty was working his way toward a vision of existential continuity, "the antecedent unity of the me-world" that he gropingly characterized as the "chiasm." [9]

This ontological issue underlying experience bears some relation to another division of aesthetic experience in which what is a complex contextual condition is

broken up into parts more easily identified and named in terms of common understanding. Thus debates have persisted over generations about emotion in appreciative experience, about expression and symbol, about the resemblance between an artistic rendering of an object and the actual object – all dimensions of a single continuous process of appreciation. Obviously one cannot dismiss issues debated with complex prolixity with a verbal gesture. But it is worth considering whether such accounts mistake undeniable and significant aspects of the experience of art or nature, such as feeling, communication, language, meaning, and resemblance with the world beyond, for the whole of the experience.

This can be seen as a kind of philosophical metonomy, leading to what I have elsewhere called "surrogate theories of art," theories that are misleading not so much by being mistaken as by being incomplete.[10] It is common, for example, to identify an emotional component or quality in appreciative experience. Yet to attempt to associate a specific emotion with the aesthetic experience of particular objects or occasions vastly simplifies a quality that pervades appreciation but cannot be separated from that full, complex experience. Similar claims of incompleteness can be made of other common theories. Each fastens on a dimension of aesthetic experience and, like the blind Indians trying to tell what an elephant really is, senses a partial truth that it takes for the whole. As Wordsworth put it, "We murder to dissect." [11]

Domains of aesthetic value

Earlier in this chapter I observed that value is commonly associated with the aesthetic, and that value can actually originate in the aesthetic. At the same time it is important to remember that aesthetic perception is, at center, a somatic event or activity, however complex and culturally appropriated it may be, and that sensory experience, taken in itself, is an event that is value neutral. Sensation just *is*, but experience is screened through normative filters that usually assign moral standing. Experience in general derives value from its context and its associations; and aesthetic experience is associated with the fine arts, whose value casts its glow over it. But taken alone, sensory perception is simply a complex neural and more generally somatic event in a person's history. Sensory stimuli are just that, and under ordinary conditions they are occluded by external strictures, often moral ones, that are embedded in those experiences and appear to be inherent in them. Cultural features do indeed meld with sensory events, but it is important not to ascribe those features to the physical sensation.

It is common in the West to regard visual and auditory perception as inherently superior to other sensory modalities, hence the elevated status assigned to the visual arts. But when experiences involve bodily functions and activities, or when perception

is overtly physical, as in touch, smell, and taste, they are automatically accorded a lower status and are immediately suspect. Indeed, designating perception “lower” or “higher” imposes a moral, or should we say a moralistic standard on experience, and it is a criterion that is irrelevant to aesthetic value as such. This is an insidious instance of the long tradition of the moral oppression of art. A classical expression of this judgment is the comment attributed to Plato that, although the beautiful is invoked by the pleasure of sight and hearing, viewing the act of love is far from agreeable to the sense of sight or beautiful.[12] This is no rare example, for sense perception is never pure sensation but is always affected by a multitude of factors. Common influences frame aesthetic experience in various ways and it is important in characterizing such experience to try to identify them. Notwithstanding the qualifications just mentioned, experience is central in any discussion of aesthetics and is the source of the value we ascribe to the aesthetic.

As I have noted, sensation denotes neural activity and is simply a bodily event. It is rarely, if ever, "pure." If we could extrapolate sensation from every cultural influence and consider it just as organic activity, in such a limited context its value as a healthy sensory process would be relatively modest. Yet much sensory experience itself, especially when involving bodily functions, is colored by moral judgments. This is important to recognize, for normative claims often made about the arts that ascribe moral value to the experience of those arts. Regardless of whether such judgments

are supportable or not, they must be kept distinct from aesthetic (i.e. sensory) perception. Here is where the phenomenological method is invaluable, for it can help us remain clear about what we are actually perceiving and how we are judging it.

Distinguishing between aesthetic experience and aesthetic value can be useful in understanding art that challenges or ridicules or even supports widely held beliefs, such as those concerning sexual morality and religious orthodoxy, social values about gender and racial equality, and political ones about human rights. Convention typically reacts violently to such artistic criticism, often in blasphemous contradiction to the very values it espouses. Thus religion is turned into a shield to justify and protect the intolerance or animosity of its believers who nominally follow its teachings of brotherly love, compassion, and generosity. Love of one's country may become the incentive for suppression and persecution in the name of democracy, belying the freedom and tolerance that it parades beyond its borders.[13] The sanctity of human life is used to justify legal and illegal violence directed toward those endorse and engage in practices that promote human life values, violence that belies those very values. Thus the unending controversy over abortion, for to proscribe its choice would inevitably produce pain, self-violence, and damage to life already existing. It would not be difficult to extend this list to an appalling length in this age of deeply conflicting values.

Perceptual experience itself is direct and immediate. It is inherently valuable and may be universally sought. As we noted earlier, such value is traditionally taken to be self-sufficient and separate from any utilitarian interest in the object with which it is concerned, using the common distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value. It is usually assumed that these are exclusive and exhaustive.

It takes little effort to recognize, however, that normative experience rarely observes this distinction, and this is true in the arts as everywhere else. All intrinsic experiences have effects and these effects must necessarily be associated with those experiences, even if unrecognized or unknown. We may prize the aesthetic pleasure and illuminated understanding we gain in visiting a museum of fine art, but consequences are inseparable from such valuing. The visit may lead us to become more aware of our immediate surroundings, we may become more discerning in our apprehension of minute differences of color, of qualities of light and of shapes and their interrelations, or we may view people or places with finer attention to detail and nuance. These are some of the personal effects a museum visit may produce, but there are many consequences less directly but no less significantly involved: environmental effects from travelling to the exhibition, social effects in changing one's understanding of, say, illness, poverty, dissipation, or careless consumption; political effects in the attempts of governmental bodies to censor or suppress an exhibition; economic effects

in the costs of maintaining the museum, in the employment of staff, in the cost of admission; cultural effects in the results of the scholarship required to research the background of the exhibition, in the pedagogical utility of visits by schoolchildren or student assignments. This list of effects could easily be doubled or trebled.

Aesthetic experience, like mystical and religious experience, is characteristically immediate and is experienced directly and without intermediary. This gives it a certain, unequivocal authenticity. Unlike the mystical, the aesthetic never loses touch with its origins in body activity and receptivity; we remain aware of and actively engaged in somatic perception. And unlike the religious, it requires no myth or doctrine to explain and justify itself, nor does it lead us beyond to a different realm. The aesthetic is content to remain exactly what and where it is, and to elaborate skeins of memory, understanding, and especially of active and intense perceptual awareness on its own. In this sense, the aesthetic is self-sufficient and self-gratifying, and therefore, I believe, most authentic.

Even though immediate, aesthetic experience, as I have noted, is never pure, never simple sensation. Like all perceptual experience, the aesthetic is not only mediated by culture; it is itself inherently cultural. Cultural influences pervade our sensory perceptions. At the same time, these influences also profoundly affect our

values, for inasmuch as values are not an extraterrestrial incursion into human affairs but assimilated in living situations, the aesthetic has a certain originality.[14] Indeed, it may be the point from which all other values spring and the base on which all values ultimately rest.

Just as aesthetic values are rarely if ever exclusively intrinsic, taken wholly in themselves, so they are not necessarily positive. Resting on perception, the aesthetic may be experienced at any place in the range of values from highly positive to unqualifiedly negative. With greater perceptual sensitivity one's capacities for experience will enlarge. This enlargement may not only lead to wider and more subtle pleasures; the experience of art is as likely to produce greater awareness and sensitivity to pain, from Daumier's social and political caricatures to Anselm Kiefer's dark visions of the present world humans have made. And there are questions puzzling for aesthetic theory that arise in the painful pleasures of watching a performance of *King Lear* or reading *The Old Curiosity Shop.* Leaving the worlds of art and turning to the aesthetics of the urban environment, we are quickly overwhelmed by the superabundance of occasions for negative aesthetic experience.

Taking aesthetics broadly again to refer to the immediacy of sense experience, it is difficult to find places of aesthetic equilibrium in the ordinary course of

things, let alone occasions of elevation. There is not a sense modality that remains unscathed in the urban environment, from the cacophony of the roar of traffic and the blaring of loudspeakers in public places to the soporific blanket of canned music and intrusive private conversations over cell phones. In the gaudy or intense colors of advertising circulars and the bath of all the commercial impingements on our sensibility, hardly a sense survives unoffended. Is this the aesthetic equivalent of Descartes' evil genius, rendering every perceptual occasion not a deception but an affront? This partial catalog of sensory offences anticipates an aesthetic critique of the social environment, a matter that will assume major importance later when we explore the implications of the aesthetic for social judgment.

The scope of the aesthetic

Let me turn finally to those normative occasions, themselves. Examples such as I have just been citing may seem to stretch the range of the aesthetic beyond recognition. Yet if we apply the extended sense of the aesthetic with sensation as its center and focus on intrinsic perceptual experience, nothing in the human world is excluded. By excluding nothing on principle, by adopting no pre-determined limits, any thing or any situation may become an occasion for aesthetic experience.

Universality, however, does not imply uniformity. To say that any situation can be the occasion for aesthetic appreciation does not put everything on the same footing nor does it give everything equal value. A complex field lies before us in which differences occur and discriminations apply. The visual arts, for example, vary in materials, styles, subject matter, and uses and are therefore incomparable; precise determinations of value become impossible. The same can be said of every other art, including music, architecture, literature, and dance, and this raises problems of comparative value that may be unsolvable. Should punk rock be judged against the nineteenth century symphony? Hummel figurines against Paleolithic ones? Magazine illustrations against the masterworks of studio art? Differences in media, style, intent, and appreciation do not necessarily translate into quantitative differences in value. A democracy of the arts would allow each art a legitimate place without imposing an external normative standard on it. Is an insolvable problem a legitimate one?

Let us consider what we can say and what is worth considering. An important factor is not only the difficulty but the undesirability of constructing a comparative order of aesthetic value in any art or between arts. It would be better to let sleeping differences lie and turn rather to discriminating our experiences of appreciation. As with the arts, however, experiences allow no normative scale of appreciation. Some listeners are caught up in the feelings stimulated by rock music, others are transported

by the Mozart *Requiem*. It is easy to discriminate differences between those experiences of appreciation, but the choice should be left to the listener. Perhaps the most that can be said about comparative judgments is the insight found throughout the history of philosophic thought, from Augustine to Mill, that it takes genuine experience of both to be able to determine value. Here it is the auditor who has had such a breadth of experience who is the best judge, and for him or herself only, with relevance perhaps for those of similar background and sensibility. This is the origin of public evaluation, where similarity of experience leads to generally accepted normative judgments.

Part of what makes differences of judgment so difficult to resolve comes from the fact that values, in this case aesthetic values, are not scalar. Such values do not differ quantitatively but only qualitatively, and qualitative differences cannot be measured. While values may vary in extent, in intensity, and normatively (that is, in being experienced and considered as positive, neutral, or negative), they admit of no precise degrees, only differences. Differences must be acknowledged but judgment reserved. Differences in appreciative experience are unavoidable, but at the same time the fact that similar valuations cluster around the same art objects suggests the possibility, indeed the likelihood, that judgments will concur. Rather than looking for differences in value, let us look for differences in experience and knowledge, recognizing that the ultimate criterion is personal. Normativity is inherent in the experience of values. They

may be contrasted modally as positive, negative, different, indifferent, etc. but their variability is qualitative rather than quantitative. And we must recognize all the while that value, itself, is an indeterminate category and perception always unique. Particular experiences of aesthetic value have properties or characteristics that can be identified and distinguished. At the same time appreciative experiences also have holistic properties recognized in the 'tone' of an experiential whole, its pervasive character.

Finally, this discussion of normative judgment would benefit from some basic distinctions. We can think of these as discriminative orders of normative experience. First (logically as well as empirically) is recognizing the experience finally and ultimately *as* normative experience, as the social, moral, or aesthetic experience that it is. A second order of value experience, here aesthetic value, is not only as simply experience but experience cognized, that is, as value identified, recognized, discriminated, and associated with aspects of an art object or an aesthetic situation. A third order of normative judgment is the assessment of aesthetic value. The difference between aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment is critical. And to return to the point that opened this discussion, admitting the universal applicability of normative judgment puts neither their types nor occasions in the same pot. Here it is possible to discriminate numerous domains of value, aesthetic or other, distinctions that depend on the need and the occasion.

One of the broadest and most widely recognized domains of normative experience is that of the arts, and it is here that the possibilities of aesthetic experience may be realized most fully. In the arts the aesthetic is at its most direct and intense, and is most fully developed. This capacity to evoke appreciative experience creates an incentive to develop an aesthetics of the arts that describes and clarifies what aesthetic appreciation consists in. Such an aesthetic understanding would identify the loci of appreciation and justify the grounds for judgments of beauty and skill--all founded on such experience. In its narrowest, most traditional meaning, aesthetic experience focuses on an art object. Along with broadly expanded art activity and production and their diffusion throughout the larger culture, the range of aesthetic appreciation has been extended to environment, and environmental aesthetics has grown from an interest in natural beauty to the aesthetics of the human environment, including the built environment and the environment of everyday life. In all of these regions the scale and scope of aesthetic experience have grown, as well, and with this greater inclusiveness new domains of appreciation have emerged. In addition, the aesthetic significance of the sublime has re-entered aesthetic discourse and so, more recently, have judgments of transcendence.[15]

Finally, the aesthetic has expanded to include what I call social aesthetics, social

values manifested in the relations among people, individually and in groups, and in discussions that recognize aesthetics and ethics as inextricably intertwined. From Plato's acknowledgement of moral beauty and his suspicions of art's social effects up to the present day, philosophers have occasionally touched on such values. Dewey, like Schiller, saw art as a means of enhancing social cohesion, and Jürgen Habermas has turned to the aesthetic as a means of overcoming the splintering of society. The critical question here lies in the connections between the aesthetic and the social and in the relevance of the one to the other. This book endeavors to use the aesthetic as a waayto renew and rehabilitate social experience and value and not consign it to a derivative role in culture.

ENDNOTES

[1] Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620), xcv.

[2] The classic account of this historical development is P.O. Kristeller's "The Modern System of the Arts" originally published in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XII (1951), No. 4, 496-527, and Vol. XIII (1952) No. 1, 17-46, and often reprinted.

[3] See Chapter 1.

[4] Plato's *Hippias Major* is often cited as one of the most prominent classical expressions of this distinction among the senses, where the pleasure found in sight and hearing is associated with the beautiful, while the pleasures found in smell and love-making are not. *Hippias Major*, 299a. My essay, “The Sensuous and the Sensual in Aesthetics” (1964), was early among recent efforts to expand the esthetic relevance of all the senses. Reprinted in *Re-thinking Aesthetics, Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), Ch. 5.

[5] “All experience is aesthetic by definition because to experience is equivalent to aesthesis.” Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershott: Ashgate, 2007), p. 35.

[6] R. W. Hepburn, “Wonder,” in *'Wonder' and Other Essays. Eight Studies in Aesthetics and Neighbouring Fields* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press: 1984).

[7] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* , trans. N.K. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), p.65, §1).

[7] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), pp. 38, 76-77 (§1 and 22).

[9] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, (Evanston, Northwestern University Press: 1968), pp. 249, 261, 249m, 256ff.

[10] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetic Field, A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Springfield, IL: CC Thomas, 1970), ch. 1.

[11] William Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned." The full stanza reads,

"Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:--
We murder to dissect."

John Haldane has called my attention to the 19th century Scottish philosopher (and phenomenology pre-figurer) James Ferrier, who gave wonderfully graphic illustrations of the same point: "The human mind, not to speak it profanely, is like the goose that laid golden eggs. The metaphysician resembles the analytic poulterer who slew it to get at

them in a lump, and found nothing for his pains . . . . Cut into the mind metaphysically, with a view to grasping the embryo truth, and of ascertaining the process by which all these bright results are elaborated in the womb, and every trace of 'what has been' vanishes beneath the knife; the breathing realities are dead, and lifeless abstractions are in their place". *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Consciousness* (1838).

[12] *Hippias Major*. While some doubt has been cast on the authenticity of Plato's authorship, this bears little on the point being made here. We might remark that the subtlety of the exchanges and their dramatic embodiment in this presumably early dialogue are comparable to those of the dialogues whose authorship is not in question. The skill with which the dialogue is composed does credit to whomever its author may be and, most important here, the prevalence of that view of aesthetic senses does not rely on its author. See also Note. 4.

[13] An egregious example is the persecution of political dissenters as unpatriotic or un-American, while that very persecution blatantly contradicts the very values it purports to uphold.

[14] The positive value associated with the aesthetic has been appropriated by many cultural interests, some tangentially related even to an enlarged sense of the aesthetic, others shamelessly exploiting its favorable connotation. Examples of the first are its use

in plans for land use in environmental impact statements that consider the "effects on aesthetics," and in the explicit appeal to the aesthetic in promoting fashion, style, and advertising design. Instances of the second occur when reference is made to success as aesthetic, and to aesthetic labor. Cosmetic surgery and dentistry (to achieve "facial aesthetic harmony") are a major industry, as are aesthetic cosmetics. It is no surprise to find reference to aesthetic consumption and the aesthetic consumer, including the aesthetic view of wine, and its social use occurs in judgments of social quality and social facilitation ("sociability is an aesthetic that needs to be considered when designing social software"). These just begin the list.

[15] The most influential modern discussions of the sublime were initiated by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant in the seventeenth century. Contemporary aesthetics has reaffirmed its importance, as in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Ronald Hepburn has explored the transcendent quality of aesthetic experience. See R. W. Hepburn, *'Wonder' and Other Essays. Eight Studies in Aesthetics and Neighbouring Fields* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press: 1984), "Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination," in *Environmental Values*, Vol. 5,1996, 191-204, and *The Reach of the Aesthetic* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). Chapter Ten, below, extends the

range of the sublime to encompass the negative as a distinguishing feature of the contemporary world.