

# PUBLISHED VERSION

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**Beauty**

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## **Beauty**

Jennifer A. McMahon

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## **Introduction**

Philosophical interest in beauty began with the earliest recorded philosophers. Beauty was deemed to be an essential ingredient in a good life and so what it was, where it was to be found, and how it was to be included in a life were prime considerations. The way beauty has been conceived has been influenced by an author's other philosophical commitments—metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical—and such commitments reflect the historical and cultural position of the author. For example, beauty is a manifestation of the divine on earth to which we respond with love and adoration; beauty is a harmony of the soul that we achieve through cultivating feeling in a rational and tempered way; beauty is an idea raised in us by certain objective features of the world; beauty is a sentiment that can nonetheless be cultivated to be appropriate to its object; beauty is the object of a judgment by which we exercise the social, comparative, and intersubjective elements of cognition, and so on. Such views on beauty not only reveal underlying philosophical commitments but also reflect positive contributions to understanding the nature of value and the relation between mind and world. One way to distinguish between beauty theories is according to the conception of the human being that they assume or imply, for

example, where they fall on the continuum from determinism to free will, ungrounded notions of compatibilism notwithstanding. For example, theories at the latter end might carve out a sense of genuine innovation and creativity in human endeavors while at the other end of the spectrum authors may conceive of beauty as an environmental trigger for consumption, procreation, or preservation in the interests of the individual. Treating beauty experiences as in some respect intentional, characterizes beauty theory prior to the 20th century and since, mainly in historically inspired writing on beauty. However, treating beauty as affect or sensation has always had its representatives and is most visible today in evolutionary-inspired accounts of beauty (though not all evolutionary accounts fit this classification). Beauty theory falls under some combination of metaphysics, epistemology, meta-ethics, aesthetics, and psychology. Although during the 20th century beauty was more likely to be conceived as an evaluative concept for art, recent philosophical interest in beauty can again be seen to exercise arguments pertaining to metaphysics, epistemology, meta-ethics, philosophy of meaning, and language in addition to philosophy of art and environmental aesthetics. This work has been funded by an Australian Research Council Grant: DP150103143 (Taste and Community).

### **Anthologies and Reference Works**

Anthologies on beauty that bring together writers who, while they may discuss art, do so in the main only to reveal our capacity for beauty, include the excellent selection of historical readings collected in the one-volume Hofstadter and Kuhns [1976](#) and the more culturally inclusive collection Cooper [1997](#). Recent anthologies on beauty can take the form of a study of aesthetic value, such as in Schaper [1983](#), or more specifically on the ethical dimension of aesthetic value, such as in Hagberg [2008](#). Reference works in philosophical aesthetics today tend to focus on the philosophy of art and criticism. They typically include one chapter on beauty, and in this context Mothersill [2004](#) treats beauty as an evaluative category for art; and in keeping with this approach, Mothersill 2009 recommends a historically informed understanding of the concept beauty derived from Hegel. A recent trend toward environmental aesthetics brings us back to beauty as a property of the natural world, as in Zangwill [2003](#), while McMahon [2005](#) responds to empirical trends by treating beauty as a value compatible with naturalization. The comprehensive entry **\*\*Beauty\*\*** in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* is divided into four parts. It begins with Stephen David Ross's brief but excellent summary of the history of concepts that underpin beauty theory and philosophical aesthetics more broadly. It is followed by Nickolas Pappas's dedicated section on classical concepts of beauty, and then Jan A. Aertsen's section on medieval concepts of beauty. The entry concludes with Nicholas Riggle's discussion of beauty and love, which introduces contemporary themes to the topic. Guyer 2014 analyses historical trends in approaches to beauty theory in a way which sets up illuminating contrasts to contemporary perspectives.

Cooper, David. *Aesthetics: The Classic Readings*. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997. Introductions are provided to some of the classic readings on beauty followed by an extract from the relevant work. They are discussed in terms of their relevance to understanding art rather than value more generally.

Guyer, Paul. *A History of Modern Aesthetics Vol.1-3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Guyer traces the development of key concepts in aesthetics, including beauty, within a context of broader scaled trends, such as aesthetics of truth in the ancient world, aesthetics of emotion and imagination in the eighteenth century; and aesthetics of meaning and significance in the twentieth.

Hagberg, Garry I., ed. *Art and Ethical Criticism*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

A series of papers on the ethical dimension of art, the authors draw out the ethical significance of a particular art/literary/musical work or art form. It is worth noting that the lead essay by Paul Guyer argues that 18th-century writers on beauty did not hold any concepts incompatible with this approach.

Hofstadter, A., and R. Kuhns, eds. *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

Well-chosen readings from classic works, with commentary provided, marred occasionally by the editors' anachronistic emphasis on art. The readings provide a good introduction to various conceptions of beauty as a general value.

McMahon, Jennifer A. "Beauty." In *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*. 2d ed. Edited by Berys Gaut and Dominic Lopes, 307–319. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

A historical overview drawing out the contrast between sensuous- and formal/value-oriented approaches to beauty, culminating in the contrast between Freud's pleasure principle and the constructivist approach of cognitive science.

Mothersill, Mary. "Beauty and the Critic's Judgment: Remapping Aesthetics." In *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*. Edited by Peter Kivy, 152–166. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004.

Setting out the change in focus in philosophical aesthetics between the 19th and 20th century, Mothersill then proceeds to analyze beauty with a view to its significance for understanding aesthetic value in relation to art.

Mothersill, Mary. "Beauty." In *A Companion to Aesthetics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edited by Stephen Davies, Kathleen Higgins, Robert Hopkins, Robert Stecker, and David E. Cooper, 166-171. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Mothersill considers the contributions made by key historical figures before settling on Hegel's historicism as providing the most helpful insight for the present context. Available online.

"Beauty." In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edited by Michael Kelly. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

In the course of setting out the historical foundations to the concept beauty, we are provided with an excellent summary of the key concepts that still dominate or underpin philosophical aesthetics, including pleasure, desire, the good, disinterest, taste, value, and love. Available at [Oxford Art Online](#) by subscription.

Schaper, Eva, ed. *Pleasure, Preference and Value*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

A series of essays by prominent philosophers on the nature of aesthetic value, which are very useful as an introduction to the study of value theory, including essays on taste, pleasure, aesthetic interest, aesthetic realism, and aesthetic objectivity.

Zangwill, Nick. "Beauty." In *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Edited by Jerrold Levinson, 325–343. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

An introduction to the tradition of analytic approaches to value theory, beauty is analyzed into its components and relationships, and its status considered in terms of subjectivity and objectivity.

### **Beauty Analyzed**

Beauty is often analyzed into hierarchical components: such as the properties or qualities that are in some sense beauty's base and the kind of relation that exists between beauty and its base, such as supervenience, emergence, or an act of deliberation. Conclusions are then drawn or defended regarding objectivity-subjectivity, cognitivism-noncognitivism, realism-antirealism, and necessary and sufficient conditions regarding beauty. Zangwill [2001](#) characterizes beauty's base as a combination of sensuous or formal properties and beauty's relation to its base as supervenience in order to defend aesthetic realism. The supervenience relation between base properties and beauty has been critiqued by Zemach [1997](#). It points to the influence of fashion on taste, where over time the supervenience base remains the same, but the supervening property might change. Zemach attempts to reconcile the idea of beauty as an objective property with the idea that judgments of beauty are always perspectival. According to Mothersill [1984](#), through rational deliberation beauty can be discerned in some combination of formal aesthetic properties. Formal aesthetic properties are those properties that have no simple names, are revealed only by acquaintance, and are grasped only through considerable attention to the object. Mothersill draws attention to the objective nature of beauty's subjectivity, which might be understood to show how cognitivism and subjectivity are compatible in judgments of beauty. Higgins [2000](#), Engler [1990](#), and Engler [2002](#) argue that beauty is a cluster concept. They identify conditions for beauty, though each author understands the nature of the conditions differently: Higgins as culturally grounded sufficient conditions and beauty an emergent property, and Engler as necessary and sufficient according to a robust aesthetic realism. In any case, the conditions they each identify include those that lack necessary and sufficient conditions such as radiance (Higgins) and elegance and harmony (Engler), so we are no closer to necessary or sufficient conditions for beauty. Sircello [1975](#) avoids a hierarchical approach, arguing that beauty is a property that exists in an object to a qualitatively high degree and satisfies certain necessary conditions: it is found pleasurable by a connoisseur of the aspect in question and excludes properties considered a defect relative to the object's perceived function. Sibley [1965](#) has argued that all aesthetic properties are noncondition governed (i.e., they lack necessary or sufficient conditions) except negatively. "Condition governed negatively" refers to those properties that, when present, preclude a particular aesthetic property. So for example, bold harsh lines might be sufficient to preclude delicacy. Promising in this vein is Lorand [1994](#), with its identification of sufficient conditions for the absence of beauty. While Lorand at times might be understood to suggest that certain kinds of object might simply preclude beauty, De Clercq [2005](#) would suggest otherwise, arguing that there is no category of aesthetic objects.

De Clercq, Rafael. "Aesthetic Terms, Metaphor, and the Nature of Aesthetic Properties." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63:1 (2005): 27-32.

Argues that there is no particular category of aesthetic objects and aesthetic terms can be used universally (to any kind of thing or object). This is thought to be significant because it suggests that an analysis of any kind of aesthetic property whether of a perceptual or non-perceptual object should be applicable to understanding the nature of aesthetic properties *simpliciter*.

Engler, Gideon. "Aesthetics in Science and in Art." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 30.1 (1990): 24-34.

Argues that there are five conditions that in combination are sufficient for scientific/mathematical beauty. They are symmetry, simplicity, order/coherence/unity, elegance, and harmony. The latter two, elegance and harmony, are also necessary conditions. Engler explains what these mean in the scientific/mathematical context.

Engler, Gideon. "'Einstein and the most beautiful theories in Physics.'" *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 16.1 (2002): 27-37.

To the necessary conditions of elegance and harmony, in combination with the sufficient conditions of symmetry, simplicity, and order/coherence/unity, Engler now argues that perfect logical consistency is necessary for beauty. In this paper, he analyses particular scientific theories in terms of their beauty.

Higgins, Kathleen. "Beauty and Its Kitsch Competitors." In *Beauty Matters*. Edited by Peg Brand, 87-111. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Identifies a cluster of seven conditions for beauty including orderly structure, unity wrought from distinct elements, perfection, an occasion for epiphany, radiance, overpowering impact, and the incitement of love, in the process distinguishing beauty from kitsch, flawlessness, and glamour. Higgins's conditions are sufficient in some combination, but none of the conditions are necessary.

Lorand, Ruth. "Beauty and Its Opposites." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52.4 (1994): 399-406.

Lorand argues that although there are no necessary or sufficient conditions for beauty, there are features that, when true of any object, are sufficient to preclude beauty. An object cannot be beautiful and ugly, meaningless, kitsch, boring, insignificant, or irrelevant. Hence, beauty is not condition governed except negatively.

Mothersill, Mary. *Beauty Restored*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1984.

This is the text commonly thought to have revived interest in philosophical theories of beauty. Since the publication of this book, a steady stream of studies on beauty have appeared. Mothersill distinguishes between personal preference and aesthetic judgments and argues that when a focus on formal aesthetic qualities causes pleasure, we are experiencing beauty.

Sibley, Frank N. "Aesthetic Concepts." In *Collected Papers on Aesthetics*. Edited by C. Barrett, 61-89. Oxford: Blackwell, 1965.

This has become one of the classic papers in philosophical aesthetics in the analytical tradition. Sibley identifies five different kinds of concepts in terms of the degree to which they are

condition governed. He argues that aesthetic properties are not condition governed except some are condition governed negatively.

Sircello, Guy. *A New Theory of Beauty*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975.

Argues that beauty is a property that is enjoyed and cannot be measured in a quantitative sense or experienced as a deficiency, and that only those with sufficient experience of the particular quality (and are capable of enjoying beauty in objects of the kind under consideration) can judge an object's beauty.

Zangwill, Nick. *The Metaphysics of Beauty*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.

Analyzes the relation of aesthetic properties to nonaesthetic properties, analyzes the relation of beauty to other aesthetic concepts, and defends a version of aesthetic realism, suggesting that there is a hierarchy of aesthetic properties with beauty being the ultimate positive verdict. The relation between the nonaesthetic and aesthetic is supervenience.

Zemach, Eddy M. *Real Beauty*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Develops a theory of beauty according to which beauty is always judged from a particular cultural (rather than personal) perspective and shows how this can be deemed compatible with the objectivity of beauty. A two-way dependency relation is identified between aesthetic realism and scientific realism.

### **The Sensuous and Desire**

The Sophists in ancient Greece taught that beauty concerned the pleasures of the eye and ear. Those theories that treat beauty as a sensuous property, or at least make no distinction between sensuous preference and beauty in some contexts, such as that expressed in Sircello [1989](#), typically assume our response to beauty is characterized by desire. An encyclopedia entry on beauty and sex, Freeland [2006](#) discusses many such theories. In Tatarkiewicz [1974](#), a historian of aesthetic theories tells us that the 3rd-century theologian-philosopher Tertullian claimed that beauty was put on this earth by the devil to distract us from the good, so presumably Tertullian thought beauty was an object of desire, while Johannes Scotus Erigena, a theologian and philosopher in the 9th century, argued that a mind filled with desire for an object could not perceive its beauty. This latter view reflects the tradition according to which beauty is understood as an expression of freedom, as it showed that people could be motivated by a higher or secondary nature; hence, they were not completely compelled in their actions by the physical needs and desires of primary nature. This is the context of Erigena's writing on beauty. However, in stark contrast, Dutton [2009](#) takes the Tertullian line in conception if not in evaluation when it conceives beauty as a sensuous property of objects that we are naturally predisposed to desire or consume in some way with various metaphorical cases derived from this more primary case. Certain works, such as Nehamas [2007](#), link all such desire for beauty to sexual desire, an approach found in the beauty theory of Pinker [1997](#) in evolutionary psychology and Ramachandran and Hirstein [1999](#) in neuroscience. An unexpected implication of conceiving of beauty as an instinct is cultural chauvinism. Without intentionality in the equation, taste for beauty would seem to have its own trajectory if practiced over time, and hence the art culture usually drawn upon to demonstrate beauty in these accounts is presented as the necessary culmination of beauty sensibility rather than as contingent and culturally relative. Such accounts would have to assume that variations between cultures reflect variations in progress along a

necessary trajectory. To return to a latter-day Tertullian, the 19th-century Danish philosopher Kierkegaard held both sensuous and intellectual conceptions of beauty, indirectly condemning the former when he argued that the excessive appreciation of beauty's sensuous nature reveals ethical immaturity (Kierkegaard [1992](#)).

Dutton, Denis. *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure & Human Evolution*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2009.

Beauty can be understood as an environmental trigger to motivate actions that enhance or once enhanced survival. This is presented as a view to counter relativism; however, such views imply the philosophically naive thesis that objects are simply given in cognition.

Freeland, Cynthia. "Beauty and Sex." In *Sex from Plato to Paglia: A Philosophical Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. Edited by Alan Soble, 86–95. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2006.

Presents a summary of a very comprehensive selection of those beauty theories in which a relation to beauty as sexual stimulant or sexual catalyst can be identified. Freeland provides a brief reference to the context of the author's perspective and provides a further impressive range of references.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/or: A Fragment of Life*. Edited by Victor Eremita and translated by Alistair Hannay. London: Penguin, 1992.

Written in 1843 as if by two anonymous authors, two opposing ways to live are defended on aesthetic grounds. On the one hand, a life that is responsible, ordered, and purposeful, while on the other, a life directed to continuous short-term pleasures, correspond to two opposing conceptions of beauty.

Nehamas, Alexander. *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Presents a conception of beauty according to which all beauty is linked to the erotic and all beauty is the object of longing or a desire of some sort. The author demonstrates his ideas through discussing his responses to a favorite painting. A paperback version was published in 2010.

Pinker, Stephen. *How the Mind Works*. New York: Norton, 1997.

Beauty is almost exclusively taken to mean sexual attraction by Pinker. Pinker has his own variations on this theme including that all forms deemed attractive reflect the form exhibited by fertile females, or regarding the male, involvement in art demonstrates their access to leisure time having secured the necessities of life, hence their desirability as a mate.

Ramachandran, V. S., and W. Hirstein. "The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6.6–7 (1999): 15–51.

This paper argues that all combinations of visual elements found beautiful somehow reflect relations that exist in objects, the consumption of which will aid our survival or those of our offspring.

Sircello, Guy. *Love and Beauty*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.

The author discusses sexual love and relationships, attempting to demonstrate longing and desire as an example of the phenomenology of beauty. Not as philosophically interesting as his earlier book on beauty, Sircello extends his theory of beauty as a property of a qualitatively high degree into the realm of human physical relationships.

Tatarkiewicz, Wladyslaw. *The History of Aesthetics*. Vols. 1–2. The Hague: Mouton, 1974.

Of three volumes, Volumes 1 and 2 provide an account of the various philosophical figures from the ancient and medieval period who wrote on beauty. The philosophers that are discussed link beauty to the human being's relation to the larger scheme of things in various ways according to their culturally based metaphysical and religious commitments.

### **Standards**

Among those who treat beauty as a property are authors who aim to identify standards by which one ought to judge the merit of art, aesthetic objects, or, in the case of Hepburn [1993](#), nature. This is not to be confused with Kant's claim of the a priori universality of aesthetic judgments in his "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," which refers to the conditions under which someone takes themselves to be making an aesthetic judgment regardless of whether others agree. However, some commentators such as Brent Kalar (Kalar [2006](#)) attempt to derive standards of beauty from Kant's aesthetic theory in a way that preserves the relation between beauty and pleasure as intentional rather than causal. In another vein entirely, Etcoff [1999](#) presents a good example of the largely nonphilosophical causal account of beauty, drawing upon cognitive science and evolutionary theory to ground what the author considers standards of beauty in women and men. In contrast, Brand [2000](#) assembles a collection of papers that contest the notion of universal standards of physical beauty in men and women. On the beauty of the environment, Carlson and Parsons [2008](#) argues that when appreciating natural beauty, we should be constrained by scientifically based concepts of the object analogous to the way we might consider knowledge of an artist and their style, aims, and purposes necessary for an appreciation of their art. Bourdieu [1984](#) treats beauty as a culturally imposed standard by which we are coerced into hierarchies of taste in the interest of certain dominant groups, while Wolf [1990](#) applies the same argument to standards of beauty imposed by men upon women to undermine their autonomy. The most famous essay on aesthetic standards warrants special mention. David Hume's essay written in the 18th century, Hume [1987](#), suggests we do well to pay attention to those around us whom we judge to be better at such judgment either generally or in regard to particular kinds of objects about which they are knowledgeable and experienced. As such, although there are standards of beauty, the point is not so much to get it right for its own sake but to approximate our values to those in our communities.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.

Argues that aesthetic categories, particularly conceptions of beauty, are conceived in ways that serve to reinforce the public's endorsement of their ruling elite. As a consequence, the aesthetic of lower or subclasses is implicitly judged inferior relative to the ruling class.

Brand, Peg Zeglin, ed. *Beauty Matters*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

A collection of essays from various perspectives; the common thread is an examination of the kinds of qualities, objects, designs, ideas, and perspectives that can be endorsed on aesthetic

grounds. In total, the views expressed present a challenge to traditional conceptions of standards of beauty.

Carlson, Allen, and Glenn Parsons. *Functional Beauty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

The purpose here is to establish an objective basis for correct standards of beauty so as to avoid relativism. Kendall Walton's categories of art are used as an analogy for scientific categories of nature for the purpose of using beauty as a guide for conservation of the natural environment.

Etcoff, Nancy. *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*. London: Little, Brown, 1999.

A psychology of beauty that is as reductive as the standard evolutionary accounts only more detailed, informative, and better researched than is typical of these accounts. This book is mentioned in various analytical approaches to naturalizing beauty. However, the content of the arguments is largely unexamined philosophically.

Hepburn, Ronald W. "Trivial and Serious in Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature." In *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*. Edited by Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, 65–80. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Concerned with establishing standards of natural beauty against competing interests of industry, commerce, and urban expansion, the author tends toward legislating about what is deemed the appropriate object of appreciation when one appreciates nature. He eventually capitulates, admitting that it is the most aesthetically rewarding perception that is the right one.

Hume, David. "Of the Standard of Taste." In *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*. Edited by E. Miller, 226–252. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1987.

Written in 1757, the key idea is that although there may be principles of taste, these are discovered empirically. However, the test is whether by adopting the principles in appreciating an object, one's sentiment is appropriately engaged because only our experience can verify principles of taste.

Kalar, Brent. *The Demands of Taste in Kant's Aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2006.

Deriving standards for judging beauty in art and nature from Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," Kalar attempts to reconcile Kant's claim of the universality of aesthetic judgment with the normative demand to take pleasure in the object judged to be beautiful.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1990.

The main argument is influenced by Bourdieu's theory of beauty according to which aesthetic value is exploited by the dominant ruling classes. Wolf argues that men exploit women's susceptibility to standards of beauty. The nature of beauty that would allow it to be easily exploited is not the focus.

## **Beauty and Art**

Immanuel Kant in the late 18th century treated the beauty of nature as the exemplar of beauty but introduced "art" as evidence of our capacity for beauty. During the 19th century, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel thought that evidence that beauty was the expression of freedom was to be found in our involvement with art, not in our responses to nature. However, while the cognitive nature of art for Hegel has led many commentators to downplay the importance of

beauty in Hegel's aesthetics, Peters 2015 argues that beauty still figures prominently in Hegel's theory of art. And while Kant is often assumed to have treated the beauty of art as non-cognitive, Guyer [1997](#) presents a convincing argument that would have us appreciate the layered and complex nature of Kant's conception of fine art. Visual and literary artists such as William Hogarth and Leo Tolstoy critiqued their own art forms and in the process developed their own accounts of beauty as a defense or critique of their own styles of painting and writing, respectively (Hogarth [1955](#), Tolstoy [1969](#)). Beauty was no longer associated with orientating ourselves to the world as an exercise in free will and finding our agency against the determinism of nature but instead became a term to refer to what was considered to be of artistic merit. In the early 20th century, philosophers and art theorists continued in this vein, developing theories of beauty that would serve the art they championed. The philosopher R. G. Collingwood focused on Cubism and Paul Cezanne, arguing that the apprehension of the beauty of the work required the perceiver to mentally reconstruct the artwork (Collingwood [1958](#)), while the art theorist Clement Greenberg focused on the existential aspects of the painting (as opposed to representation) to demonstrate how one would appreciate the beauty of American abstraction such as Abstract Expressionism (Greenberg [1961](#)). Another approach to the study of beauty and art is to draw upon a classical or seminal theory of beauty and show how it can be interpreted in ways that would enhance understanding of contemporary art. Nehamas [2007](#) and Pippin 2013 adopt this approach in relation to Plato's theory of beauty and Hegel's theory of art and beauty respectively. Crowther [2010](#) successfully adopts this approach in relation to Kantian aesthetics. Jacques Rancière is a key figure in keeping alive an interest in the relation between freedom and aesthetic value in his writing on the political significance of art (Rancière [2009](#)).

Collingwood, R. G. *Principles of Art*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

The theory of beauty developed is implicitly presented as a guide to art criticism and appreciation, with the work of Cezanne treated as the exemplar that reveals the essential character of art. Many of Collingwood's insights are still illuminating in regard to contemporary art, particularly conceptual art. Ebook available.

Crowther, Paul. *The Kantian Aesthetic: From Knowledge to the Avant-Garde*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

An interpretation of the core thesis of Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" with the view to extending some of its key insights to accommodate contemporary art; Crowther attempts to reinvigorate our understanding of the relevance of Kantian aesthetics for contemporary art. A paperback version was published in 2014.

Greenberg, Clement. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon, 1961.

The artwork does not represent reality but is itself an original. An analogy might be helpful here. An array of intersecting and overlapping reeds in a tangle of undergrowth does not copy or represent something else. Neither do the skeins of paint on a canvas, yet both can have aesthetic value.

Guyer, Paul. "Kant's Conception of Fine Art." In *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. 2d ed. Edited by Paul Guyer, 351–368. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Provides a close reading of Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," offering textual evidence to support the view that Kant did not advocate aesthetic formalism in the sense commonly employed today.

Hogarth, William. *The Analysis of Beauty*. Edited by Joseph Burke. Oxford: Clarendon, 1955.

Written in 1753, Hogarth identifies the components of art that constitute its beauty such as what he calls the serpentine line and the "form" of the triangle. He argues, however, that what we know the object to be influences whether we can find such components beautiful. Contrast and variety are also important.

Nehamas, Alexander. *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

An extension to everyday objects and artworks of a conception of beauty derived from Plato. However, Nehamas's interpretation of Plato's conception of beauty as the object not only of love but also of desire is controversial. A similar reservation extends to his notion of Kant's aesthetic formalism.

Peters, Julia. *Hegel on Beauty*. New York and London: Routledge, 2015.

Argues that Hegel did not privilege art over nature concerning beauty but instead conceived art as the means by which soul or mind could be expressed, and the vehicle for such expression was beauty or idealised form. What was considered idealised form developed through history.

Pippin, Robert. *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.

Pippin argues that Hegel's core thesis concerning the meaning and significance of art has different implications for understanding art after Hegel, than Hegel himself could have anticipated. Through analysis of paintings by Manet and Cezanne, Pippin demonstrates the awareness that Hegel initiated in aesthetics toward the conditions for ascribing meaning to art.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London and New York: Verso, 2009.

Through engagement made possible by artistic forms of endeavor, new ways of carving up experience can be revealed or invented. Independent from what nature would prescribe for a person, artistic endeavor is linked to morality, human agency, or what in earlier theories would be thought of as spirit, will, or freedom, hence the possibility of human culture.

Tolstoy, Leo. *What Is Art? And Essays on Art*. Translated by Aylmer Maude. London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Tolstoy's earlier essay "On Art," written around 1896, argues that content without form and sincerity is information; attention to form for its own sake is "art for art's sake"; and sincerity without important content and clear form is self-indulgence. Only the combination of significant content, formal excellence, and sincere artistic intention to a high degree results in beauty.

### **Beauty and Disinterest**

The notion of "disinterest," which is still used as a foil for cognitive aesthetic theories, can be traced back to aesthetic attitude and aesthetic perception theories that proliferated in the early and mid-20th century, such as in Stolnitz [1960](#), which according to Rind [2002](#) mistakenly

attributes its own conceptions of disinterested perception and disinterested attitude to various 18th-century philosophers, particularly Immanuel Kant. In a similar vein to Rind, Zangwill [2003](#) points out that the notion of disinterest found in Kant, applies only to the pleasure of beauty, not the judgment, reflection, or attitude. The idea of disinterested pleasure found in Kant possibly relates to the theoretical interest to identify a social (and hence moral) disposition in humans that is neither desire nor duty, in order to overcome the sentiment versus reason debate that existed at the time concerning morality. Kant owned a translation of Cicero's *On Duties* 1913 (as did Hume) in which Cicero discusses the Stoic Panaetius's notion of harmony of the soul, moral beauty, moral sensibility, or decorum. The distinctive character of the relevant pleasure shares some similarities with Christian Wolff's notion of the pleasure of perfection that, according to Beiser [2009](#), was understood by Wolff as intentional pleasure in contrast to pleasure as pure affect. The distinctions among three kinds of pleasure that we find in Kant's aesthetic theory appear in a treatise written by his predecessor, Francis Hutcheson, who distinguished among pleasures of appetite, prudential interest, and beauty (Hutcheson [1971](#)). It is instructive that Hutcheson deemed his conception of beauty compatible with the beauty of intellectual constructs such as may be found in historical writing. The sense in which Kant writes that we do not take interest in the object of beauty is compatible with other 18th-century writers such as Hutcheson and the third Earl of Shaftesbury. As Guyer [2005](#) points out, Shaftesbury believed that the relevance of an object's utility could be relevant to its beauty without compromising the independence of the pleasure taken in beauty from the possession, use, or consumption of it. The independence referred to the basis of the pleasure, not the basis of the configuration, concept, or construct about which an aesthetic judgment was made. Levinson [1996](#) adapts and develops a notion of disinterested pleasure in relation to aesthetic judgment that furthers some aspects of Kant's account. Riggle [2016](#) critiques Levinson's account by arguing that Kant's conception of aesthetic ideas supports a shift away from pleasure toward love as the defining response to beauty. Korsmeyer [2006](#) argues that pleasure, when stripped of its misconceptions, aptly characterizes the experience of beauty.

Beiser, Frederick C. *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

A very useful discussion of Christian Wolff's aesthetic theory, locating it historically and drawing together his writings on aesthetics from various sources. Wolff's conception of the kind of pleasure taken in perfection can be understood as a useful lead on Kant's conception of disinterested pleasure.

Cicero, Marcus. *On Duties (De Officiis)*. Translated by Walter Miller. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913.

Written in the 1st century BCE, Cicero discusses second-generation ancient Stoic Panaetius's ideas on the relation between sensibility and rationality in moral judgments. Panaetius's *On Being Yourself* and *On Function* no longer exist, but Cicero's references are corroborated by Seneca, Demosthenes (in Plutarch), and later, Diogenes Laertius and Galen.

Guyer, Paul. "Beauty and Utility in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics." In *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*. Edited by Paul Guyer, 110–128. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Provides a very useful discussion of the ideas on beauty-as-utility held by 18th-century writers on beauty. A sense is demonstrated in which beauty-as-utility is not incompatible with the idea that the pleasure found in beauty is independent of the pleasure of owning, using, or consuming the object.

Hutcheson, Francis. *Inquiry into the Original of Our Idea of Beauty and Virtue*. New York: Garland, 1971.

In this work written in 1725, Hutcheson holds that our perception of beauty orientates us to the world in a way conducive to morality. To this end, he distinguishes between the pleasure of appetite, of personal benefit, and of beauty. That we find things beautiful that are good for us is a sign of God's beneficence.

Korsmeyer, Carolyn. "Terrible Beauties." In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*. Edited by Matthew Kieran, 51-65. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.  
Argues that many misconceptions of beauty stem from contrasting beauty with the wrong values (the ugly and the sublime) and from two mistaken assumptions: that pleasure is the opposite of pain and that pleasure is a bodily sensation. Korsmeyer argues that showing an emotion through a new lens is the pleasure of beauty. To test this, disgust, is considered.

Levinson, Jerrold. *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Argues that aesthetic qualities are constituted by relationships of dependence and mutual involvement among a comprehensive set of properties of the artwork, including vehicle (observable structure), content (specific qualities and meanings), historical setting, and context. If attention to this aspect of the work results in disinterested pleasure, then the work is aesthetically successful.

Riggle, Nick. "On the Interest in Beauty and Disinterest." *Philosophers' Imprint* 16. 9 (2016): 1-14.

Critiques the positive and negative aspects of disinterested pleasure as identified by Levinson: these include the due attention to the object, and without personal interests, respectively. Includes evocative examples drawn from literary works to demonstrate that experiences of beauty are connected to how we construe ourselves and our place in the world. Kant's conception of aesthetic ideas is eventually drawn upon to argue that "love" rather than "pleasure" might better characterize an experience of beauty.

Rind, Miles. "The Concept of Disinterestedness in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40.1 (2002): 67-87.

Convincingly dissociates 18th-century philosophical writings on beauty from the notion of disinterested perception developed by Jerome Stolnitz. Stolnitz's notion can be recognized as the basis of the caricatures of disinterest and formalism (mistakenly associated with Kant) often used as a foil in recent 20th-century analytical writing on philosophy of art and natural beauty.

Stolnitz, Jerome. *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960.

Arguably misrepresents 18th-century writing on beauty by applying the term "disinterest" to judging and reflecting. Many authors argue in contrast that the correct use of "disinterest" in

18th-century writing refers to the basis upon which one takes pleasure in the object, not the basis upon which one interprets or conceives the object.

Zangwill, Nick. "UnKantian Notions of Disinterest." In *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*. Edited by Paul Guyer, 63–66. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

Sets out the ways in which the notion of "disinterest" is caricatured in recent discussions of beauty, and explains how these notions differ from the way the term "disinterest" functions in Kant's aesthetic theory.

### **Beauty and Nature**

According to Hepburn [2004](#), while the beauty of nature was an important consideration prior to the 20th century, it was subsequently overshadowed once the metaphysical and religious basis of its preeminence had faded. In the 20th century, beauty was reconceived as an evaluative concept of art. However, although philosophical writing on the aesthetics of nature did continue in those writers interested in the sublime and those writers working in the tradition of Immanuel Kant, in recent years a new focus has emerged. The renewed interest in the beauty of nature has been spearheaded by authors such as Allen Carlson and Glenn Parsons, who argue that beauty has an instrumental value in directing us toward what is worth conserving in the natural environment (Carlson [2004](#), Carlson and Parsons [2008](#)). They argue that one should configure the natural environment according to scientifically constrained classes and categories in a way analogous to the categories of art applied in art appreciation. Whereas art appreciation theories are concerned with promoting engagement with artistic intention as evidenced in the work, Carlson and Parsons assert that scientific categories they treat as natural kinds ought to be the constraints on what is deemed relevant to appreciation of nature's beauty. Their foil is nature treated as picturesque or as appreciated according to theories of aesthetic distance. This foil is adopted by most of the authors writing on environmental beauty. However, Marcia Muelder Eaton, who argues that the experience of the beauty of nature involves caring about and engaging with the environment, criticizes the earlier version of Carlson's scientifically grounded conception of beauty as overly intellectual (Eaton [2001](#)). Nick Zangwill digs his heels in, however, with a version of formalism that would satisfy an aesthetic attitude theorist, but his motivation is a robust aesthetic realism (Zangwill [2001](#)). It is worth noting that the new developments in environmental aesthetics are as tangential to Kantian aesthetics as Zangwill's formalism. As Guyer [2005](#) has argued, consideration of what an object is used for may be relevant to an aesthetic judgment without undermining Kant's particular sense of aesthetic form. Savile [1987](#) draws out another sense of utility from Kant's theory, according to which the beauty of nature orientates us toward it in such a way that we feel incorporated into it rather than alienated from it. This is in complete contrast to Friedrich Nietzsche, according to whom beauty in nature is an illusion we project upon it in order to mask the true horror of reality and make life palatable for us (Nietzsche [1967](#)). Kemal and Gaskell 1993 and Moore 2008 temper such a view by analyzing concepts of natural beauty relative to their cultural contexts. A notable contrast between them is that while Kemal and Gaskell reject the idea that natural beauty is fundamental within any hierarchy of aesthetic concepts, Moore argues that an experience of natural beauty is a bedrock expression of value.

Carlson, Allen. "Appreciation and the Natural Environment." In *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*. Edited by Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant, 63–75. Peterborough, Canada: Broadview, 2004.

Presents a basis to appreciating natural beauty opposed to perceiving it as picturesque landscape. This is the essay, originally published in 1979, that directed attention back to natural beauty about which there now exists a growing literature.

Carlson, Allen, and Glenn Parsons. *Functional Beauty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. In an attempt to avoid relativism in aesthetic judgments, Carlson and Parsons develop a framework for aesthetically appreciating nature that is grounded in scientific categories, analogous to Kendall Walton's categories of art.

Eaton, Marcia Muelder. *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. In Part 4, Eaton critiques Carlson's aesthetic theory of nature, by arguing that imaginative engagement is essential for aesthetic appreciation. She argues that the appreciation of beauty should be cultivated in objects worth conserving. So instead of beauty guiding conservation, beauty is used to facilitate the conservation of objects judged to be worth conserving on other grounds.

Guyer, Paul. "Beauty and Utility in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics." In *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*. Edited by Paul Guyer, 110–128. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Provides a very useful discussion of the ideas on beauty-as-utility held by 18th-century writers on beauty. A sense is demonstrated in which beauty-as-utility is not incompatible with the idea that the pleasure found in beauty is independent of the pleasure of owning, using, or consuming the object.

Hepburn, Ronald W. "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty." In *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*. Edited by Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant, 43–62. Peterborough, Canada: Broadview, 2004.

Associating the pre-20th-century emphasis on natural beauty with metaphysical or religious beliefs, the author attempts to discover a secular-based ground for appreciating nature aesthetically. This essay, originally published in 1966, is treated as a classic by those authors who have taken up the mantle of natural beauty in the context of environmental aesthetics.

Kemal, Salim, and Ivan Gaskell (eds). *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

The papers interweave conceptions of nature and landscape art, which the editors argue show that attempts at a hierarchy of concepts with natural beauty as a foundation is doomed because the relevant interactions are far too complex. The editors compare concepts of nature-without-metaphysics with nature-as-reflection-of-transcendent-values. The editors here attempt to move on from puzzles which result from overly narrow conceptions of aesthetic experience to an increased understanding of aesthetic experience within human culture.

Moore, Ronald. *Natural Beauty: A Theory of Aesthetics Beyond the Arts*. Ch.5 Aesthetic experience revisited 91-104. Toronto, Canada: Broadview Press, 2008.

Conceptions of nature which have evolved historically are components within the aesthetic experience of nature. The author distances his account from environmental aesthetics presumably as his account is devoid of the ideological tenor of much work in that area. Instead, positive aesthetic responses to natural objects are treated as bedrock expressions of value, some of which can be more or less apt, given the cultural context.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967.

First published in 1872, an early work by Nietzsche flawed in style and lacking clarity in parts, nonetheless it can be salutary in the face of attempts at aesthetic realism and beauty as a call to arms for the conservation movement. Nietzsche asserts that beauty is an illusion projected onto nature to mask the horror of reality.

Savile, Anthony. *Aesthetic Reconstructions: The Seminal Writings of Lessing, Kant, and Schiller*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

Nature experienced as expressive of aesthetic ideas orientates us to the world such that we feel incorporated into it and, as Kant would say, our rational self finds a place in the sensuous world. This alerts the reader to Kant's intellectual motivation in turning to beauty in his third critique.

Zangwill, Nick. "Formal Natural Beauty." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 101.1 (2001): 209–224.

Provides a very robust version of aesthetic realism according to which aesthetic properties are objective formal properties. The price Zangwill pays for this robustness is demonstrated in his example of plastic flowers, which he treats as aesthetically indistinguishable from real flowers.

### **Beauty Contested**

In Ludwig Wittgenstein's lectures on aesthetics (Wittgenstein [1966](#)), one can find the model for a deflationary account of beauty according to which one might explore the balance between causal factors, the intention of one's engagement, and a number of other contingencies peculiar to the particular situation. Alternatively, conceptions of beauty might be understood as part of a dialectical structure according to which, as Croce [1992](#) argues, we cannot conceive of beauty without conceiving of ugliness, as the one is needed to complete the other. In addition to deflation and dialectic, beauty might be deconstructed. Bourdieu [1984](#) argues that beauty is a culturally imposed standard of taste or, more specifically, a form of cultural coercion imposed by the dominant classes. This view is not incompatible with some natural-kind theory of beauty, given that implicit in such a view is the apparent susceptibility of the masses to coercion concerning beauty. Wolf [1990](#) presents a similar deconstruction along gendered lines, while Korsmeyer [2004](#) argues that aesthetic concepts have been so exploited by male interests that they are irreversibly corrupted and require a complete reconceptualization in order to incorporate a feminine perspective. Lintott [2010](#) regrets that feminists have neglected natural beauty, arguing that expertise in feminism is required for feminist analyses of beauty. However, expertise in philosophical accounts of beauty might be useful also. The caricature of "disinterestedness" in both the feminist critiques of beauty and the burgeoning literature on environmental beauty is a case in point. However, there are those who would break with traditional aesthetics altogether, attempting to think beyond the categories of what has been referred to as Western ontotheology. Swearingen and Cutting-Gray [2002](#) goes beyond feelings

like desire, pleasure, beauty, and the sublime and treats instead feelings like bliss, glory, and what is referred to as “extreme beauty.” This project is referred to as a philosophy of difference. The concern is not to identify the relevant properties of objects or analyze the structure of the feeling involved but instead to draw attention to the social, imaginary, and constructed nature of the feelings we endorse. The feelings we endorse determine how we live, what we recognize in ourselves and others, and what we value and allow in ourselves and others. Authors who work in this vein, such as Moira Gatens (Gatens [2002](#)), are naturally drawn into the political aspect of beauty.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.

Bourdieu argues that aesthetic categories like beauty are tools of coercion, constructed in the interests of the leisured classes, to create an illusion of their “natural” superiority. The arguments are of interest in this context as they present evidence of the way cultural interests might exploit aspects of our capacity for beauty.

Croce, Benedetto. *The Aesthetic as Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

In this work written in 1902, Croce attributes a dialectical role to ugliness in the evolution of beauty. He treats aesthetic categories as mental constructions that are nonetheless public. There is a sense in which he thinks of the foundation of all our concepts as fundamentally aesthetic.

Gatens, Moira. “Post-Colonialism and History: Are We Responsible for the Past?” In *Extreme Beauty*. Edited by James Swearingen and Joanne Cutting-Gray, 142–151. New York and London: Continuum, 2002.

Draws upon Spinoza’s ethics to explain how our sense of self is part of an imaginary construction that issues from collectives. Encounters with significantly different others can unwittingly alter our construction, but we can only change this “social imaginary” from within. There is no outside, no bird’s-eye view, no neutral standpoint.

Korsmeyer, Caroline. *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge. 2004.

An examination of the way the concepts of art, creator, aesthetic value, and creativity have been constructed to celebrate the male perspective such that the very application of the terms entrenches a hierarchy of approaches and outputs that can disadvantage and devalue the female perspective.

Lintott, Sheila. “Feminist Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty.” *Environmental Values* 19.3 (2010): 315–333.

Argues that natural beauty has been neglected by feminists and suggests some approaches worth following such as Arnold Berleant’s acknowledgment that we construct our own configurations and concepts of nature rather than simply register nature as though it were a given.

Swearingen, James, and Joanne Cutting-Gray, eds. *Extreme Beauty*. New York and London: Continuum, 2002.

This is a collection of papers that present a new tradition of aesthetic value with Nietzsche as the recognized predecessor. It is presented in opposition to traditional aesthetics. This is the

philosophy of difference, replacing beauty with bliss (Barthes) or glory (Levinas) and responsibility (Derrida). The stated purpose is thinking beyond categories of Western ontotheology.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*. Edited by Cyril Barrett. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.

In these notes, assembled from lectures he gave to a small group of students at Cambridge in 1938, Wittgenstein argues that how one constructs one's understanding of aesthetic response, as in everything else, bears the marks of aesthetic choices (e.g., reductive theories exhibit the love of order, system, and closure).

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1990.

This provides a good example of a sociological analysis of beauty according to which beauty is a construct imposed by men upon women to objectify and undermine them. However, Wolf does not analyze what it is about beauty that makes it such a ready tool of coercion and oppression.

### **Beauty Experienced**

The guiding maxim of American Pragmatism after Charles Sanders Peirce is that the effects or consequences of one's conception of an object constitute at least in large part that conception. In philosophical aesthetics, Dewey [1958](#) accounted for aesthetic values like beauty by analyzing the difference they make to our experience generally. "Experience" was a core concept in Dewey's philosophy, constituted by the subject's identification and selection of elements from the flow of awareness. That is, experience is not conceived in pragmatist accounts as pure affect: the pragmatist conception of experience differs markedly from the phenomenologist's notion of "primary consciousness," such as that developed by Merleau-Ponty [1962](#). According to Dewey, there is a relation of interdependency between our apprehension and our conception of beauty. Furthermore, for Dewey and present-day aesthetic pragmatists like Yuriko Saito (Saito [2008](#)), experiences of beauty are not limited to a special category of object such as art but can be experienced in everyday objects and events. Certain pragmatists like Joseph Margolis suggest that value judgments properly so-called are subjective responses grounded in culturally acquired concepts (Margolis [2009](#)). This does not necessarily imply relativism but is compatible with a sensible pluralism in the vein of the concept of critical horizons offered in Gadamer [1986](#). In these accounts, culture refers not necessarily to the arts but to all interactions between members of a community that contribute to self-understanding constrained by the demands of communication. As such, concepts culturally acquired, internalized over a lifetime as habits of mind as Dewey suggests, necessarily have a public or social dimension. Personal experience is macroreduced to communal experience in the vein suggested by Kant's *Sensus Communis* in the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment." Somewhat tangential to the pragmatist privileging of community over individual in the order of aesthetic relations, Shusterman [2000](#) argues that beauty names the experience that is unified and harmonious, in virtue of the understanding it yields. Although latter-day aesthetic pragmatists such as Margolis, Saito, and Richard Shusterman typically dismiss Kant's aesthetic theory as arid formalism, this antipathy is arguably based on a misunderstanding of Kant's aesthetic theory to the extent that on the contrary, Kantian aesthetics can be shown to be the forerunner of experiential or pragmatist aesthetics, as McMahon [2011](#) argues.

Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Capricorn, 1958.

Aesthetic experience implicates engagement in virtue of the concepts we hold. Aesthetic experience is defined according to the activity it occasions: a fully engaged and reflective attention. The problem according to Dewey is “recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living” (p. 216).

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Edited by Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Develops a notion of pluralism as opposed to relativism through his concept of the horizons of understanding: a person factors into his or her point of view awareness that it is just one point of view. This facilitates communication between those holding different convictions, a claim sometimes made in relation to aesthetic judgment.

Margolis, Joseph. *Arts and the Definition of the Human: Toward a Philosophical Anthropology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Demonstration through discussion of art that value judgments are subjective responses grounded in culturally acquired concepts with the view to showing that this position is compatible with a sensible pluralism (as opposed to a vicious relativism). Judgment is constrained by the demands of communication and, as such, contributes to self-understanding.

McMahon, Jennifer Anne. “Aesthetic Autonomy and Praxis: Art and Language in Adorno and Habermas.” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19.2 (May 2011): 155–175.

Establishes the link between Kant’s aesthetic theory and pragmatist theories of art, language, and meaning. Discusses the art of Olafur Eliasson to draw this out.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. London: Routledge, 1962.

Focusing on what he refers to as the lived body, Merleau-Ponty argues that in art we see “the expressive operation of the body.” To the extent that he does not factor in the role of concept as mediator between things that happen to us and experience, his phenomenology can be distinguished from pragmatism.

Saito, Yuriko. *Everyday Aesthetics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Demonstrates and argues that everyday items and events can be experienced aesthetically and that experiencing them in this way enhances the quality of life.

Shusterman, Richard. *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. 2d ed. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Positioning pragmatist aesthetics relative to analytic aesthetics, on the one hand, and contemporary continental theory, on the other, Shusterman introduces his aesthetic theory that he calls soma-aesthetics. The shallow formalism so often associated with Kantian aesthetics by many contemporary philosophers of art serves as a foil to Shusterman’s cognitive aesthetic theory.

### **Beauty Formalized**

Beauty understood as pertaining to the form of perceptual unities or complex ideas has a long history. The Pythagoreans believed that beauty was to be found in the measure, proportion,

order, and harmony that was objectively present in the world. The very structure of the heavens was believed to be reflected in the mathematical proportions found in nature and human artifacts, such as music according to the aesthetic historian Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz (Tatarkiewicz 1974). In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle's conception of beauty continued along these lines, treating beauty as a causative principle demonstrated in a special degree by the mathematical sciences in order, symmetry, and definiteness (Aristotle 1960). In *Phaedrus*, Plato conceived the Form of beauty as a supersensible entity (Plato 1997). Plato's idea was that a grasp of beauty required our cultivation of primary perceptions of beauty in the sensuous until we worked through to a conception of beauty in morality, wisdom, and ultimately the good (as expounded in *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *The Laws*). Plotinus, the Neoplatonist, develops a mystical version of Platonic Form according to which the more that matter exhibits the formal harmonies of proportion and balance, the more the object and our perception of it partake of the One or God (Plotinus 1966). This idea influences theories of beauty throughout the medieval period. For Thomas Aquinas, beauty was an object of both perception and cognition, perceived firsthand but engaging cognition through its revelation of unity, clarity, and intensity (Aquinas 1964–1976). An alternative to the Neoplatonist tradition of Plato's influence are the second- and third-generation Stoics. According to Cicero, for the second-generation Stoic Panaetius, beauty was a harmony of the soul accessed through the proportion, harmony, or measure of behavior, sometimes referred to as decorum or moral beauty (Cicero 1913). This interest in moral beauty construed in secular terms, is taken up in the 18th century, culminating in the attempt by Kant to link the endorsement or feeling of respect for the moral law with the peculiar nonsensuously based pleasure of beauty (Kant 1987). By the early 20th century, the notion of beauty as form has been recast as an evaluative concept of art somewhat diminishing its link to the nature of meaning, ethics, and morality. However, vestiges of earlier concepts of beauty remain in those conceptions, for example, Scarry 1999, which relates beauty as a value to other forms of value such as moral value.

Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. Vols. 2, 19, 23, 36, 43, and 53. London and New York: Blackfriars, 1964–1976.

Aquinas, who lived in the 13th century, was committed to the view that the human being entailed a metaphysical component. Accordingly, beauty was a characteristic of the divine. Aquinas distinguished between what he referred to as biologically based pleasures and the pleasure of beauty; only the latter lifted one into a communion with the divine.

Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Translated by Richard Hope. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960.

Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher of the 4th century BCE, among his various references to beauty across a number of his works, treats order and definiteness as features of beauty, arguing that as they are present in many things, beauty must contribute as a cause to the nature of things.

Cicero, Marcus. *On Duties (De Officiis)*. Translated by Walter Miller. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913.

Cicero, in the 1st century BCE, discusses ideas of decorum and moral beauty from works by Panaetius (*On Being Yourself* and *On Function*) that no longer exist. Panaetius's ideas have been corroborated by references in Seneca, orators like Demosthenes as reported by Plutarch, and later biographers and commentators like Diogenes Laertius and Galen.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987.

In this work written in 1790, Kant adapts ideas from his philosophical predecessors and sets the agenda for philosophical aesthetics for the next two centuries and into the present. One tradition furthers the link Kant drew between aesthetic and moral value, while another defines its agenda in opposition to arguably a caricature of his key terms such as “aesthetic form” and “disinterest.”

Plato. “Phaedrus.” In *Complete Works*. Edited by J. M. Cooper, 506–556. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997.

Also see *Philebus* (pp. 398–456), *Symposium* (pp. 457–505), *Laws* (pp. 1318–1616). As an ancient Greek philosopher of the 4th century BCE, many of Plato’s ideas on beauty reverberate down through the centuries. That appreciation of beauty requires cultivation, not in appearances but in our concepts of appearances, and that we respond to the higher forms of beauty, not with pleasure but with love without desire, exemplifies contemporary understanding reminiscent of Plato.

Plotinus. *Enneads*. Translated by A. H. Armstrong. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966.

Living in the 3rd century, Plotinus provides an example of the way Plato’s ideas were translated into mystical theologies. Plotinus translates Plato’s “Form” into a sign of the presence of God or the One. When we apprehend beauty, we are each partaking of the mind of God.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Provides an example of a contemporary formalist theory of beauty in the original sense of “formalist.” The focus on form provides a means by which to identify an aspect of pleasurable or life-reaffirming engagement with the world based on an aspect other than satisfaction of appetite or personal gain.

Tatarkiewicz, Wladyslaw. *The History of Aesthetics*. Vol. 1–2. The Hague: Mouton, 1974.

Divided into three volumes, the first two cover ancient and medieval aesthetics, respectively. It provides a useful way of grounding the philosophical interest in beauty in a wider philosophical context. Beauty named a way of orientating oneself to the world and was a guide to what was worth knowing, doing, and loving.

### **Beauty and Evaluation**

The original conception of beauty as form that involved establishing a link between our appetites and our morality was set aside in much early-20th-century writing on aesthetics in order to focus upon evaluative categories for art criticism. Art/music/literary theorists develop what is arguably a new notion of artistic form that is sometimes mistakenly interpreted as having derived from earlier accounts, sometimes turning the earlier conceptions into caricatures in the process. The notion of significant form, for example, in Bell [1914](#) and doctrine of music as tonally moving forms in Hanslick [1957](#) were categories devised to guide art and music appreciation for its own sake. Collingwood [1958](#), however, apparently alert to this equivocation on form, focuses instead on the imaginative component of aesthetic form that to some extent develops an idea from Kant that would reveal our engagement in art as a symptom of our human agency (as opposed to mere

affect), a thought that Collingwood furthers in his distinction between amusement and art. Greenberg [1961](#) attempted to shift our mind-set away from the limitations of conceiving of art as representation. The work argued that the picture inhabits the same order of space as our bodies, and as such, the artwork is an object in its own right rather than a copy or imagined equivalent of something else. Beardsley 1981 develops a different line of thought, simply reasoning that the difference between art and nonart is in virtue of aesthetic form. It identifies the various elements of aesthetic form across the various media, including visual art, music, performance, and literature. Levinson [1996](#) can be understood as developing this idea further by factoring in contextual elements. It identifies relationships of dependence and mutual involvement among a comprehensive set of properties of the artwork. Langer [1953](#) conceived of the relevant form as objectified feeling. Langer developed what has been called structural expressionism, according to which artistic form is structurally isomorphic with the nature of emotional experience. Differences in aesthetic appraisals between individuals and groups were meant to be explained rather than settled by clarifying the nature of aesthetic form. Peter Kivy has argued that in order to understand any aspect of art including form, one should focus on a particular art medium as he believes there is no generic sense of form applicable to all art media. Kivy [1997](#) focuses upon music. Yet others, like Moran 2012, discuss beauty's form in terms of its particular form of normative requirement which does apply to all art media.

Beardsley, Monroe. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981.

Elements of aesthetic form applicable to a range of art media including visual art, literature, and music are identified, respectively. Experiential elements contribute to a conception of aesthetic form that is actively constructed by the perceiver. Also provides a comprehensive coverage of topics in the analytic tradition prevalent in the mid-20th century.

Bell, Clive. *Art*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1914.

Argues that the representational content of art is irrelevant to its beauty. Proposes that a person appropriately sensitive and cultivated simply perceives the relevant aspect of art that Bell calls "significant form." He treats this form as independent of context and culture. He argues that reality reveals itself through pure form.

Collingwood, Robin G. *Principles of Art*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Develops a nuanced theory of beauty and aesthetic form that could be understood as updating Kant's aesthetic theory. Collingwood retains a sense that our engagement in art proper demonstrates our agency (free will or morality). Imagination is the key rather than perception. He presents his theory as a guide to art criticism.

Greenberg, Clement. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon, 1961.

Argues that as art requires firsthand experience as opposed to testimony or principles, this points to the different status of art to representational forms of communication. Art does not re-present anything. It consists of presentation, pure and simple. Each artwork is a new object in the world, not a copy of something else.

Hanslick, Eduard. *The Beautiful in Music*. Edited by Morris White and translated by Gustav Cohen. New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957.

Hanslick was a music critic who treated musical form as analogous to the curved lines of painting and sculpture, referring to the “primordial law of ‘harmonic progression’” to which we have access through our “mental vision.” Philosophically undeveloped, but nonetheless a good example of the evaluative category that aesthetic form became.

Kivy, Peter. *Philosophies of Arts: An Essay in Differences*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Discusses some similarities and differences between the possibility of abstraction and form perception in visual and auditory perception. He discusses whether it is possible to perceive the visual as an array of visual elements apart from what the elements represent, whereas such abstract perceiving, he argues, is a great deal easier where music is concerned.

Langer, Susanne. *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953. Treats artistic form as the vehicle for the communication of feeling, effectively explaining how rational deliberation is necessary for artistic expression. However, she does not account for variations in perceptions regarding which forms are isomorphic with which emotions.

Levinson, Jerrold. *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Presents a complex formalism, according to which aesthetic qualities are constituted by the relationships of dependence and mutual involvement among a comprehensive set of properties of the artwork, including vehicle (observable structure), content (specific qualities and meanings), historical setting, and context.

Moran, Richard. “Kant, Proust, and the Appeal of Beauty.” *Critical Inquiry* 38.2 (2012): 298-329.

Moran provides an account of the normative force of beauty illustrated by examples. He explains what it feels like, drawing examples from Proust’s writing, and shows the sense in which it places demands upon others. He outlines the norm of responsiveness which he argues is prior to the other conditions for a correct judgment that is contained in the idea of beauty. These conditions imply ways to fall short in one’s response or evaluation.

### **Beauty and Aesthetic Form**

The most philosophically committed of formalist theories of beauty do not conceive the relevant form as an objective property of the object. Aesthetic form is not a perceptual given but instead involves a judgment. In Gasche [2003](#), aesthetic form is understood as a deployment of perceptual processes such that no determinate interface between perception and cognition results. Guyer [1997](#) provides an interpretation of Kant’s notion of aesthetic form according to which the apprehension of it amounts to a second-order perception where the concept one applies determines what is noticed in the object and hence whether the perception of the object gives rise to an experience of the imaginative unity of aesthetic form. Allison [2001](#) argues that aesthetic form refers to the imaginative ordering of an object’s features, a form of reflection that is not so much a second-order perception but one that certain objects facilitate in primary perception. Lorand [2000](#) focuses on the perceptual principles of aesthetic form to distinguish it from logical form. Rancière [2006](#) suggests that the apprehension of meaning in art (implicitly in virtue of aesthetic form) necessarily involves a dialogical process in which one compares one’s

apprehension of the object in principle or in practice with others to ascertain whether one's configuring of the elements is optimal for the context in question. This interaction involves the communication of feeling both between artist and viewer and between viewers, the latter relevant to nonart objects and nature. Such processes represent an alternative basis for rational communication. In a similar vein, Nussbaum [1990](#) argues that to develop the right description or configuration of an event for ethical reflection involves the cultivation of empathy for the perspective of the other. The judgment required in the very way one describes or configures the event implicates aesthetic form. Adorno [1999](#) argues that aesthetic form refers to the uncovering and creation of new ways of conceiving experience unrestrained by entrenched and unexamined modes of thought that necessarily restrict the linguistically constituted thought. This is the idea that experience is not exhausted by linguistically grounded concepts and hence there is something else to be communicated such as rationally structured feeling. These characteristics of the communicative capacity of art inspire an interest in the aesthetic in the work of many later socially oriented philosophers, such as Habermas [2011](#), where aesthetic form is sometimes invoked to explain how new conceptions of experience can emerge; or in Tinguely [2018](#) where aesthetic form is invoked to explain how any kind of conception of experience is possible at all.

Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated and edited by Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Athlone, 1999.

In a difficult and dense text on first reading, Adorno argues that aesthetic form provides a means to critique and transcend established patterns of value and knowledge in virtue of being nondiscursive but nonetheless communicative due to its inner consistency and relation to other aesthetic forms.

Allison, Henry E. *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

According to Allison, Kant limits what counts toward beauty in an object to formal properties (p. 120). The formal properties of the object when apprehended as purposive correlate with the harmony of the faculties, which is pleasurable and hence prolongs itself. This is a controversial point among prominent Kant commentators.

Gasche, Rodolphe. *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant's Aesthetics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Gasche defends the view that aesthetic judgment is noncognitive. He explains that the processes normally involved in structuring perceptual data for the purposes of cognizing objects are redeployed in aesthetic judgment such that no concept of the object is forthcoming.

Guyer, Paul. *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. 2d ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

The key concept of Kant's aesthetic theory is the harmony of the faculties, and "the form of purposiveness" is a placeholder for whatever is capable of occasioning such harmony. All kinds of properties of objects might be relevant to "the form of purposiveness" according to Guyer's well-supported and coherent interpretation of Kant's aesthetics.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Modernity versus Postmodernity." In *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Edited by Clive Cazeaux, 297–306. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

Written in 1980, this paper argues that the inner logic of the aesthetic allows for the development of new concepts from aspects of old or already entrenched concepts. This is relevant to satisfying the universal shared conditions of communication between groups and cultures. Also in the volume, a useful summary of Habermas' interest in the aesthetic is provided by the editor (pp.295-297).

Lorand, Ruth. *Aesthetic Order*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Defines and develops a conception of aesthetic form in opposition to logical form. Lorand presents a useful analysis of the difference between the kind of information, and the method of conveying it, of the two kinds of form.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Demonstrates the notion of aesthetic form (even though this is not the term used by Nussbaum) as opposed to discursive or logical form, with Nussbaum arguing that ethical questions require a consideration of context rather than the application of universal moral principles and that literature plays a central role in ethical reflection.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London and New York: Continuum, 2006.

The categories of thought are constructed through and by the institutions with which we interact directly or indirectly through our communities. The political implications of this are explored, but it is the possibility of such constructions that demonstrate the nature of aesthetic form.

Tinguely, Joseph J. *Kant and the Reorientation of Aesthetics: Finding the World*. New York and London: Routledge, 2018.

By comparing various historical accounts on the relation between communicative interests, sentiment and perception, including Aristotle and Kant on rhetoric and judgment, and Hume and Rousseau on dispositions and passions, it is argued that a conception of aesthetic form emerges that is central to our capacity for reconfiguring perceptions and impressions, one purpose of which might be to address conflicts which are not resolvable by the discursive procedures normally considered optimal for such purposes.

### **Beauty and Autonomy**

The ways in which beauty is considered autonomous are many. It might be autonomous in that what one considers relevant to an object's beauty has no relation to what the object is, its function, and its political or ethical status, as Bell [1914](#) asserts. This view is rare in philosophical writing, but those like Stolnitz [1960](#) that hold it, falsely attribute it to historical figures in the absence of other forms of support. Conversely for those that use the position as a foil to their own theories, the questionable historical link provides surrogate support. For example, Carlson [2008](#) sets up its alternative position as an improvement on Kant's aesthetic theory. Another sense of autonomy and one that more accurately characterizes historical work in aesthetics, is that judgments of beauty proper do not involve inference from premises to conclusion and, as such, beauty judgments are autonomous in this sense from the logic underpinning propositional and categorical logic. This is the view of autonomy found in Kant, and in relation to which he proceeds to defend universality (Kant [1987](#)). A related but historical materialist account of

autonomy is found in Adorno and Marcuse, according to whom the autonomy of aesthetic judgment pertains to art's independence from the entrenched and institutionalized conceptual frameworks that underpin discursive language. The idea is that the aesthetic form of art offers an alternative form of communication (Adorno [1999](#), Marcuse [1979](#)). However, it is important to note that just as Kant neither argues nor implies that the aspects of the object relevant to judgments of beauty are independent from moral, political, or ethical concerns and consequences (Guyer [2008](#)), the same can be said of the historical materialists. It was in virtue of aesthetic form that art could provide insight, and as such, art's autonomy referred to its being able to escape the constraints of literal language rather than escape literal concerns. Any reflection on the kind of engagement in objects and events that characterize human culture would demonstrate the error of separating beauty from the ethical dimension, as aptly demonstrated by the papers in Hagberg [2008](#). Autonomy is equated with rationality in Bradley 2015 where pleasure and moral development figure in the nature of judgments of beauty.

Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated and edited by Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Athlone, 1999.

Argues that sensibility and perception have a history as the concepts through which we notice aspects of experience are replete with the meanings we internalize through our interaction with various social institutions. Aesthetic form is the only vehicle that provides an opportunity in human beings for genuine invention. Originally published in 1970.

Bell, Clive. *Art*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1914.

Beauty is found in formal properties narrowly conceived according to Bell's aesthetic hypothesis. This is the position that has served many philosophers of art well by providing a foil to their own position. The second part of Bell's thesis called the metaphysical hypothesis is rarely referred to, as it takes on a more Schopenhauerian position.

Carlson, Allen. *Nature and Landscape: An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Carlson interprets Kantian aesthetics to imply that beauty is grounded in aspects of the distal array humans register as unified only in the compositional sense. Against this conception of formal beauty, Carlson develops his content-rich notion of environmental beauty.

Guyer, Paul. "Is Ethical Criticism a Problem? A Historical Perspective." In *Art and Ethical Criticism*. Edited by Gary L. Hagberg, 3–32. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.

Points to where in Kant's text one can find support for the view that theories of beauty in the 18th century did not treat the aspects of the object relevant to perceptions or experiences of beauty independently from the object's moral or functional significance.

Hagberg, Gary I., ed. *Art and Ethical Criticism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.

A collection of papers that demonstrate the moral import of what we experience as beautiful, expressive, moving, excellent, perfect, ethically insightful, or whatever one would name that experience once endorsed as beautiful.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987.

Aesthetic autonomy refers to the fact that aesthetic judgment does not involve an inference from premise to conclusion. It does not proceed by proofs. Its rational foundation does not translate into propositional or literal linguistic form. Originally published in 1790.

Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. London: Macmillan, 1979.

Argues that through the beauty of aesthetic form we are able to apprehend experience in revolutionary ways. The very presence of art in the world acts as critique on social conventional forms of thinking, and art is by definition, according to Marcuse, aesthetic form.

Murray, Bradley. *The Possibility of Culture: Pleasure and Moral Development in Kant's Aesthetics*. West Sussex: Wiley, 2015.

Murray grounds the rationality of aesthetic judgment in the constraints imposed by culture on the individual. A notion of aesthetic autonomy can be seen to be demonstrated in the freedom that aesthetic judgment so conceived, makes possible.

Stolnitz, Jerome. *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960.

Presents a concept of disinterested perception on which he grounds the concepts of aesthetic disinterested contemplation and disinterested attitude for which his main support is arguably a misrepresentation of various 18th-century philosophers on beauty.

### **Beauty and the Form of Perfection**

A concept of beauty found in medieval Arabic and Persian philosophy, according to Gonzalez [2001](#), is that our concept of what the object is meant to be defines the outlines against which our estimation of the object's perfection is evaluated, and this perfection constitutes beauty. A theory of beauty as perfection also characterizes the rationalist tradition as discussed by Beiser [2009](#), particularly in relation to the aesthetic theory of Christian Wolff. Wolff believed that the pleasure of beauty is intentional rather than a mere sentiment. This intellectually grounded notion of beauty continues in the philosophy of Hegel who conceived of beauty as ontological perfection, the notion that beauty is a quality possessed by those things that are what they are meant to be (Hegel [1975](#)). In this sense, beauty as perfection is closely linked to beauty as utility. Guyer [2005](#) compares 18th-century British accounts of beauty as utility with German accounts and locates Kant's views on beauty in relation to both. A very recent and more prosaic version of beauty-as-perfection is presented by Stephen Davies who argues that beauty is equated with utility in the sense that we perceive the form of the object relative to what we know the object to be, which includes what we know of the object's purpose or function. This notion of beauty can be reduced to a mere formula if the indeterminacy of aesthetic form is not fully appreciated. Davies does not lose sight of this, when he writes, for example, "Aesthetic considerations constrain the manner in which the primary function is to be pursued, while the nature of the primary function is relevant to determining what aesthetic effects should be aimed at" (Davies [2006](#), p. 238). This functional version of beauty-as-perfection also has an ancient pedigree in Plato's report of Socrates's views in *The Republic*: "And we judge the excellence, beauty and rightness of any implement or creature or action in relation to the use for which it was made, by man or nature" (Book 10, p. 601, in Hofstadter and Kuhns [1976](#)). This is echoed in Aristotle where he considers the beauty of a man relative to his occupations as dictated by his

particular time of life (*Rhetoric*, Book I, p. 1361b, in Hofstadter and Kuhns 1976). Many accounts include aspects of functional beauty, such as Armstrong 2004 and Sircello 1975.

Armstrong, John. *The Secret Power of Beauty*. London: Allen Lane, 2004.

In Chapter 2, Armstrong presents a very elegant case for and against the functional account of beauty, using examples to illustrate his arguments.

Beiser, Frederick C. *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

A very useful resource for a sympathetic study of aesthetic theories in German Rationalism that presents an interesting account of various influences on Kant, in some cases influences he may have tried to overcome. However, it falls into rather clichéd formalist interpretations of Kantian aesthetics.

Davies, Stephen. "Aesthetic Judgments, Artworks and Functional Beauty." *Philosophical Quarterly* 56.223 (2006): 224–241.

Davies presents a philosophically interesting account of beauty according to which the concept we have of an object determines what we notice in an object and hence what aspects contribute to the configuration we perceive as a candidate for beauty.

Gonzalez, Valerie. *Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2001.

A fascinating study of the theories of beauty developed by medieval Persian and Arabic Muslim philosophers. A study of how the ideas of Persian, Arabic, Muslim, Latin, Christian, and Jewish philosophers intermeshed during the medieval period is useful for understanding the ideas on beauty of the Early Modern philosophers.

Guyer, Paul. "Beauty and Utility in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics." In *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*. Edited by Paul Guyer, 110–128. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

A very useful comparison of the ideas on beauty as utility in Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Berkeley, Burke, Hume, Leibniz, and Wolff; with the last part of the chapter occupied with relating Kant's ideas on adherent beauty and teleology to the idea of beauty as utility.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Translated by I. M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Written between 1835 and 1838, Hegel was reluctant to acknowledge a foundational role for nonconceptual processes such as feeling or pleasure. Hegel considers the goal of everything to be perfection. The goal-oriented nature of self-awareness is fundamentally conceptual according to Hegel and hence beauty is also conceptual, namely, perfection.

Hofstadter, Albert, and Richard Kuhns. *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

An excellent selection of extracts from key ancient and historical texts on beauty, providing an overview of the conception of beauty of each author by drawing attention to the various works in

which they wrote on beauty. Extracts from Plato and Aristotle quoted in the preceding commentary.

Sircello, Guy. *A New Theory of Beauty*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975.

Develops a theory of beauty that includes as one of its key criteria that a property cannot count toward beauty if it is experienced as a deficiency in relation to the object's nature, function, or purpose. His central concept in an intriguing philosophical account is a "property of qualitative degree."

### **Beauty Judged**

When the value of beauty is associated with genius and innovation, the structure of aesthetic judgment becomes the focus. Donald Crawford reminds us that according to Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," cognition involves matching newly formed representations with what we already know, to see whether to discard the new or alter the entrenched (Crawford 1974, pp. 84–89). Judging beauty, however, is not like this. As Guyer 2006 points out, judging beauty involves a second-order perception comprised of having a perceptual (unified) experience to which one then seeks to apply a concept. It is not like an ordinary cognition (or arguably a first-order perception) where the concepts you already have more or less determine what you can notice and your attention remains focused upon literal content. Shaviro 2009 argues that in a reflecting judgment, the possibility of innovation and creativity is opened up because affect or feeling rather than the concept drives the process. Matthews 1997 considers the implications of this aspect of reflecting judgment for creativity in the scientific domain, while Savile 1987 considers the role of aesthetic ideas in imaginative engagement. Guyer 1993 points out that an aesthetic judgment involves identifying certain relations between perceptual or conceptual aspects. To this extent Crawford concurs, "Aesthetic merit or beauty is itself a relation" (Crawford 1974, p. 169). Kant argues that reflecting judgment is nonetheless communicable even though what actually constitutes the judgment is a feeling rather than a subsumption of elements under classes and categories. When one judges beauty, one's judgment is "regarded as an example of a universal rule that we are unable to state" (Kant 1987, 5:237). Hence, aesthetic judgments as reflecting judgments are communicable and, as Shaviro 2009 points out, always contestable. This aspect draws out another theme associated with aesthetic judgment that is its ethical or social function. From the discussion of Aristotle on tragedy in Nussbaum 1986, we might conclude that aesthetic judgments manifest as feelings about objects that we nonetheless treat as judgments about the objective nature of the object. This draws us into communication with our peers to ascertain the grounds of variations between our judgments because we treat them as though there is a fact of the matter. As Guyer points out (Guyer 2006, p. 329), according to (Kant 1987, 5:306), aesthetic judgments demonstrate that our sensuous selves can be oriented toward rational ends, in virtue of certain kinds of interactions within our communities. And Kneller 2018 analyses these interactions in terms of the imaginative reflective activity which has a social significance.

Crawford, Donald. *Kant's Aesthetic Theory*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974.

By analyzing the key terms of Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment—"harmony of the faculties" and "aesthetic ideas"—in terms of spatial-temporal qualities and Locke's secondary qualities, respectively, Crawford provides a more dispositional treatment than found in most commentators on Kant's aesthetics.

Guyer, Paul. *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

A collection of essays that offer an interpretation of aesthetic reflecting judgment according to which the autonomy of aesthetic judgment is a demonstration of the human being's agency. Guyer addresses the crucial question concerning how Kant connects sensibility with morality that involves a capacity linked to creativity and genius.

Guyer, Paul. "The Beautiful, Sublime, and Morally Good." In *Kant*. Edited by Paul Guyer, 307–333. London: Routledge, 2006.

In a very useful analysis and discussion of Kant's aesthetic theory, Guyer locates Kant's concepts of beauty and the sublime within Kant's broader concerns concerning moral motivation and community.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987.

This is the seminal text in philosophical aesthetics. The concepts and variables that continue to define what can be debated concerning the nature of aesthetic judgment are set out in this text. This particular translation balances literal translation with contemporary formulations. Other excellent translations are Meredith, and Guyer and Matthews.

Kneller, Jane. "Aesthetics and Communication." In *Social Aesthetics and Moral Judgment: Pleasure, Reflection, and Accountability*. Edited by Jennifer A. McMahon, 213–224. New York and London: Routledge, 2018.

While aesthetic pleasure resulting from imaginative reflective activity is fundamentally personal, it is also communicable. This activity produces and sustains itself, but also aims to be shared with others. An analogy is drawn between the features of this kind of reflective judgment in the role such judgments play in social development; and their role in the development of social cohesion in culturally diverse communities. The occasion for the latter can be reflective judgments about art.

Matthews, Patricia. *The Significance of Beauty: Kant on Feeling and the System of the Mind*. Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1997.

Argues that the disinterested, universal aspect of our aesthetic liking indicates a human being's ability to judge from an enlarged perspective, from the point of view of everyone else, and leaves the mind in a state of reflection conducive to making connections and indicating where in nature order is to be found.

Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Explores the relation of emotion and cognition in reflective responses to literature and drama, through the discussion of examples, particularly ancient Greek tragedy.

Savile, Anthony. *Aesthetic Reconstructions: The Seminal Writings of Lessing, Kant, and Schiller*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

In an interesting interpretation of Kant's aesthetic theory, Savile analyzes the nature and significance of Kant's doctrine of aesthetic ideas for creative and imaginative conceptions of the self in relation to the world.

Shaviro, Steven. *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.

An examination of aesthetic reflecting judgment, which compares the concepts of experience (individual events) and feeling in the thought of Alfred North Whitehead with comparable concepts of experience (continuous) and feeling in Gilles Deleuze. Aesthetic judgment is given a pivotal role in understanding the human orientation to knowing and judging.

### **Aesthetic Judgment and Community**

Hume [1987](#) explores the possibility of shared aesthetic values or taste among members of a community. This interest in shared aesthetic values and community drives authors like Friedrich Schiller (Schiller [1982](#)). He believes that while "survival needs drive the individual into society" and "rational deliberation implants within *her* the principles of social behavior," an appreciation of beauty motivates the cultivation of social character within the individual. How this plays out in practice might involve a community's involvement in a range of cultural activities. For example, according to Gadamer [1986](#), the communicative dimension of festivals demonstrates the communicative dimension of art and beauty that relies on an active construction of meaning. Gadamer draws our attention to the constraints on our understanding played by tradition and experience. He acknowledges that taste is partly inherited through traditions and in part constituted by the community that exercises it. Furthermore, according to Kneller [2011](#), the formal structure of aesthetic judgment as identified by Kant involves reflection that broadens the mind to entertain possibilities beyond one's own goals. Kneller argues that aesthetic judgment can be understood as an appropriate kind of judgment for facilitating communication between those who hold different cultural beliefs. In a similar vein, other works such as O'Neill 1992 draw attention to the emphasis that Kant puts upon the comparative dimension of aesthetic judgment, intersubjectivity, and his notion of *Sensus Communis* in the third critique. According to Hampshire [1989](#), aesthetic judgment involves the process whereby we cultivate habits of mind conducive to sociability. Rancière [2009](#) treats the challenges to consensus that art can promote as the relevant context to promote community, that is, a community of sense or "aesthetic communities." The idea might be, as Grant Kester argues, we are never a closed or finished system in the sense that communication entails taking on an aspect of the other's subjectivity, and aesthetic judgment is exemplary in this regard. Kester 2013 calls it "dialogical aesthetics." Many works on the theme of aesthetic judgment or beauty and community, such as Nancy [2000](#), maintain that understanding aesthetic judgment can contribute to solving the problem of identifying the grounds of community among those with different perspectives, values, and norms.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Edited by Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

*The Relevance of the Beautiful* consists of an introduction and three lectures on play, symbol, and festivals, respectively. Gadamer argues that when an awareness that one's judgment is made from a particular cultural perspective is incorporated into that judgment, it leads to a rationally grounded pluralism (not to be confused with relativism).

Hampshire, Stuart. "The Social Spirit of Mankind." In *Kant's Transcendental Deductions*. Edited by Eckart Förster, 145–156. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989.

An interesting case is made for understanding the relation between aesthetic judgment and the development and cultivation of our social selves as a pivotal point within Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment."

Hume, David. "Of the Standard of Taste." In *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*. Edited by E. Miller, 226–252. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1987.

In an essay that inherits the problem of sentimentalism versus rationality, Hume examines the possibility of agreement on aesthetic matters. He opts for a rationally grounded sentiment that approximates objective standards, deemed to be so by those considered to be equipped with the prerequisite capacities and informed by relevant experiences.

Kester, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. 2d ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

An examination of various theories of art authored by art historians through discussion of particular artworks to demonstrate the dialectical nature of the development of new art forms. This is extended to an individual's interaction with art where an aesthetic judgment is by its nature dialectical.

Kneller, Jane. "Aesthetic Reflection and Community." In *Kant and the Concept of Community*. Edited by Charlton Payne and Lucas Thorpe, 260–283. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011.

Aesthetic judgment avoids dogmatism and mere opinion, engaging reflection without prudential interest or satisfaction of appetite (the sense of disinterest that Kneller adopts), and requires firsthand experience. Aesthetic reflecting judgment is the kind of experience of alternative viewpoints that facilitates empathy and communication. Kneller calls this application "aesthetic judgment of community."

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.

The author argues that there can be no sense of self without an engagement with others. The sense of others is achieved through engagement rather than a preconceived definition of a group. This idea is extended to the possibility of community among multicultural groups through a discussion of particular political impasses.

O'Neill, Onora. "Vindicating Reason." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992: 280-308.

O'Neill argues that the passages on the *sensus communis* in Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," "distinguish different aspects of reason's task more sharply" than in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, including that "reason presupposes plurality – without – preestablished harmony." (308, fn 17).

Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliot. London and New York: Verso, 2009.

Through new art forms we in effect establish new communities. Rancière focuses on disagreement as the basis for new knowledge in which “dissensus” is under perpetual pressure to be ordered by our compulsion for order and sense. This is the driving force of communication, the aesthetic aspect of the political.

Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*. Edited and translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby. Oxford: Clarendon, 1982.

In letter 27, written in 1795, Schiller points out that the pleasures of the senses and of the intellect are individual pleasures and, as such, might set us against each other. However, through engagement in community we can realize our freedom because it is only then that personal interests cease to be our master.

### **Beauty Motivated**

According to Plato, the sensuously beautiful seduced us onto a path that eventually revealed moral beauty and later the beauty of wisdom and finally the good (*Symposium*). For Plato, unchecked physical compulsions were associated with ignorance and disorder, while human reason was associated with the good and the beautiful that were unchanging and absolute (*Phaedrus*). Sherman [1997](#) argues that an appreciation of order was also a motivation for wisdom and virtue for Aristotle. According to Aristotle, “[I]t is customary to say of well-executed works that nothing can be added to them or taken away, the implication being that excess and deficiency alike destroy perfection, while the mean preserves it. . . . It is possible, for example, to feel fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity, and pleasure and pain generally, too much or too little; and both of these are wrong. But to have these feelings at the right times on the right grounds towards the right people for the right motive and in the right way is to feel them to an intermediate, that is to the best, degree; and this is the mark of virtue” (*The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, rev. ed, New York: Penguin, 1976, p. 101). As such, Rogers [1993](#) argues that, for Aristotle, virtue is praiseworthy because it is beautiful rather than beautiful because it is praiseworthy. The higher forms of beauty were associated with a perceptual order by Plotinus, but many ancient authors such as Plato, the ancient Chinese philosopher Xunzi, and the second-generation ancient Stoic Panaetius also believed that being exposed to such order would educate one’s desires toward morality and truth (Plato [1997](#), Xunzi [1963](#), Cicero [1913](#)). For Plotinus, beauty was a manifestation of the divine on earth, and according to the 18th-century British philosopher Francis Hutcheson, the fact that we find systems and order in the world pleasing is a sign of a beneficent God because such beauty attracts us to what is worth knowing and how we should live to prosper (Hutcheson [1971](#)). Kant’s thesis in the “Critique of Aesthetic Judgment” was more subtle. Beauty was an experience that we were predisposed to have of aspects of the world whose purpose was to orientate us toward it as both a natural and a moral place. Similarly, Scarry [1999](#) argues that experiences of beauty cultivate a perspective amenable to acting justly, with others’ interests weighed fairly against one’s own interests.

Aristotle. “Book 2, Moral Goodness, 1106b, 1109a–b.” In *Nicomachean Ethics*. Edited by D. A. Rees. Oxford: Clarendon, 1951.

Written in the 4th century BCE, Aristotle’s discussions in Book 2 demonstrate the relevance of feelings to moral choice and the way one can cultivate a feeling for balance and harmony so as to inform moral behavior. Copublished (New York: Oxford University Press).

Cicero, Marcus. *On Duties (De Officiis)*. Translated by Walter Miller. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913.

In this work written in the 1st century BCE, Cicero refers to Panaetius's notion of harmony of the soul, decorum, moral beauty, and sensibility. There is evidence that Kant had read Cicero's *On Duties*, as had Hume. Panaetius seems to have been concerned with the relation between sensibility and rationality in moral judgments.

Hutcheson, Francis. *Inquiry into the Original of Our Idea of Beauty and Virtue 1725*. New York: Garland, 1971.

Regarding perceptions of beauty, Hutcheson argues that custom and education can only work on natural predispositions, while prejudice leaves us open to being influenced by the irrelevant. He is interested in beauty because he argues our perception of it orientates us to the world in a way conducive to morality.

Plato. *Phaedrus, Symposium, The Laws in Complete Works*. Edited by J. M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997.

Writing in the 4th century BCE, Plato considers that reason is not enough to direct us to wisdom. We need to cultivate a love of wisdom, and this we do through beauty.

Rogers, Kelly. "Aristotle's Conception of Τὸ Καλόν." *Ancient Philosophy* 13.2 (1993): 355–371.

Argues that the relation of the good to beauty can be traced back to Aristotle's virtue ethics. Beauty and the good are not identical but one is the attribute of the other, and beauty takes precedence. Virtue is praiseworthy because it is beautiful, rather than beautiful because it is praiseworthy.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Argues that if we cultivate this disinterested pleasure, we develop the capacity for viewing situations and experience from an enlarged perspective; a perspective that is not dominated by our own self-interest.

Sherman, Nancy. *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Sherman reveals evidence of an aesthetic underpinning to notions of moral judgment in a line of thought originating in Aristotle, developed through the Stoics, and culminating in the work of Kant's moral philosophy (a particular account of the genesis of our understanding of moral judgment that is recognized by Sherman as not universally acknowledged).

Xunzi. *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings*. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.

Hsun Tzu [Xunzi] adopts a consequentialist position, arguing that music is good because it embodies a larger cosmic order, an unchanging harmony, which gives shape to expressions of enjoyment and facilitates social order and, in turn, material well-being.

## **Beauty and Truth**

The interest of those authors who focus on beauty as truth ranges from the metaphysical-religious to scientific realism. Beauty at one extreme seems to have originated in the impulse for adoration, such as the Indian *rasa* reported by Coomaraswamy [1918](#) to inspire love and devotion in those who experience its rhythms. At the other extreme, beauty names a gestalt-like experience one can experience in both perceptual and intellectual compositions. According to McAllister [1996](#), the beauty of a scientific or mathematical theory can guide theory choice within paradigms so that the aesthetic a person internalizes through his or her work within a scientific or mathematical paradigm serves to stabilize and further that paradigm. An understanding of the many views that fall between the devotional and prosaic extremes might benefit from considering certain aspects of each extreme, both devotional and explanatory. Heidegger [1993](#) argues that beauty in appearance might constitute an inner truth, an experience of our inner being released from individuality and, as such, an indicator of absolute true reality. McGinn [1997](#) argues that all beauty is an appreciation of what constitutes moral beauty, which in turn constitutes a form of truth epistemologically different from, but nonetheless as genuine as, scientific truth. In contrast, we could interpret the early writing of Nietzsche to suggest that beauty is an illusion we project onto the world to make life bearable (Nietzsche [1967](#)). Carlson and Lintott [2008](#) is a collection of papers that present a version of evolutionary aesthetics according to which, when the perception of beauty is grounded in scientific categories, it would direct us to what is worth conserving in the environment. In contrast, the conception of natural beauty developed by Scruton [2009](#) draws an interesting distinction between scientific and intentional understanding. The latter refers to how nature is represented in our experience of it, and hence Scruton draws out a more philosophically loaded notion of aesthetic truth in natural beauty.

Carlson, Allen, and Sheila Lintott, eds. *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

A collection of essays linking beauty in nature to environmental action such as using beauty as a guide to conservation.

Coomaraswamy, A. K. *The Dance of Siva: Fourteen Indian Essays*. New York: The Sunwise Turn, 1918.

Presents the origins of beauty in Indian culture, the nine *rasas* or evaluative concepts through which beauty is experienced. Although it relies on the postulation of a suitably sensitive person, it is not concerned with standards as such, but with the appropriate conception of reality.

Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell, 139–212. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

There are three kinds of things in the world, of which artworks are the third kind. Nature is present at hand (affect), equipment is ready to hand (through concepts), and artworks involve a reflection on relation between equipment and nature or the true essence of things.

McAllister, James. *Beauty and Revolution in Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

McAllister presents a qualification to the idea that when empirical truth indicators are disrupted, the aesthetic can provide a guide to truth in physical theories. He argues that within paradigms,

beauty can be an effective guide to theory choice when theories are equivalent in explanatory power but theoretically incompatible.

McGinn, Colin. *Ethics, Evil and Fiction*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.

In his analysis of the difference between scientific and ethical truth, McGinn presents an argument that when we appreciate the beauty of a human artifact, we are appreciating the moral beauty of the mind that conceived it. When appreciating natural beauty, we are appreciating it as expressive of moral beauty.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967.

An early work by Nietzsche in which he argues that there are two dominant principles that underpin reality: one represents the way the world materially is and the other the way humans would will it to be. Beauty is constituted by the latter and hence is, strictly speaking, an illusion.

Scruton, Roger. *Beauty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

The chapter on natural beauty reminds us that the philosophically interesting aspect of beauty is its exercise of our intentionality, by which he means that through beauty we orientate ourselves in experience to the world in the face of the determinism of nature.

### **Beauty and Value Theory**

Philosophical accounts of beauty can read like veiled endorsements of the author's own cultural history. If one were to use such accounts in a study of the dialectics of value judgment, then one might progress our understanding of beauty. The concept of a horizon of understanding in Gadamer [1986](#) would provide the methodology, demonstrating as it does a notion of aesthetic pluralism (not to be mistaken for aesthetic relativism). Although metaphysical accounts of beauty incorporate a sense of freely engaging in the experience of beauty, most evolutionary accounts reduce the action or relation to compulsion. On the one hand, the discussion of aesthetic value in McDowell [1983](#) suggests that beauty names an experience a person might have of the world when freely conceiving of it as something of which he or she would want to be a part. On the other hand, it is a popular view of evolutionary psychologists that beauty refers to a feel-good response triggered by some aspect of the world that we are hardwired to desire. Cutting across these two extremes are aesthetic realism, antirealism, and quasi-realism. To support realism, the analyst will postulate objective aesthetic properties while a Neopragmatist might treat moral functionalism, as envisaged by Jackson and Pettit [1995](#), as an analogy for aesthetic functionalism, where the "realism" of aesthetic qualities might refer to their efficacy relative to the purposes we have in noticing and judging them. Some deflationary accounts, such as those proposed by Cavell [2002](#), would please an aesthetic antirealist, related as it is to the view that all aesthetic terms are interjections or at least originated that way in our use of them. In contrast, there are quasi-realists like Robert Hopkins who combine cognitive command and expressivism into a coherent conception of aesthetic value (Hopkins [2001](#)), developing what might be termed a sensible subjectivism after Wiggins [2002](#), but without the worry regarding noncognitivism discussed in Schellekens [2008](#). A pragmatist response (compatible with naturalism) to the apparent universal basis of subjectively based judgments is that there is a point to treating aesthetic judgment as if it were objective. Particularly when there is aesthetic disagreement, through discussion we inadvertently approximate our values to those of our peers

(or those we would want to consider our peers as we are not equally receptive to everyone) in a way that exhibits some of the procedural conditions of communication as implied by Habermas 1993, such as seeking consensus and establishing correctness.

Cavell, Stanley. "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy." In *Must We Mean What We Say?* Edited by Stanley Cavell, 73–96. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Discusses aesthetic judgment in terms of the unphraseability of poetic terms and the dialectical nature of evaluative terms. Cavell is implicitly addressing the question of nonconceptual content and the way terms acquire meaning. In this respect, aesthetic judgment is treated as exemplary of judgment in general.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Edited by Robert Bernasconi and translated by Nicholas Walker. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

These lectures develop the notion that the limits of one's perspective cannot be overcome but that the awareness of these limits can facilitate the ability to understand opposing views. The aesthetic aspect of experience is crucial to what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons of understanding.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*. Translated by Ciaran P. Cronin. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993.

The aim is to provide the procedural rules for normative validity or the conditions for communication. A pivotal question is the difference between coercion and communication and whether argumentation is the most appropriate means to avoid the former and achieve the latter. Aesthetic value might be deemed relevant here.

Hopkins, Robert. "Kant, Quasi-realism, and the Autonomy of Aesthetic Judgment." *European Journal of Philosophy* 9.2 (2001): 166–189.

Argues that expressivism, cognitive command, and the force of consensus are complementary aspects of aesthetic judgment. Hopkins also distinguishes between the objectivity of aesthetic judgment and realism, arguing that aesthetic realism would imply that we could base an aesthetic judgment on testimony. This is an important paper for those interested in aesthetic value.

Jackson, Frank, and Philip Pettit. "Moral Functionalism and Moral Motivation." *Philosophical Quarterly* 45.178 (1995): 20–40.

The authors discuss moral functionalism according to which the meaning of moral terms is relative to their function within a network of terms. The efficacy of the term and what it achieves are what constitute its meaning. This can be seen to provide a useful analogy for aesthetic terms.

McDowell, John. "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World." In *Pleasure, Preference, and Value*. Edited by Eva Schaper, 1–16. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Although there is no Archimedean point from which to know or value experience, through corroborations we can approach a convergence of facts that we rightly take as a perspectival free

reality in the Peircean sense. As such, we can consider the possibility that feeling might constitute an experience through which “the world reveals itself to us” (p. 16).

Schellekens, Elisabeth. “Three Debates in Meta-Aesthetics.” In *New Waves in Aesthetics*. Edited by Kathleen Stock and Katherine Thomson-Jones, 170–187. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Analyzes realism, objectivism, and cognitivism in relation to aesthetic properties, and suggests how one might address the weak cognitivism of Wiggins’s account of sensible subjectivism for the purposes of a more robust aesthetic objectivism.

Wiggins, David. “A Sensible Subjectivism?” In *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*. 3d Ed (amended). By David Wiggins, 185–214. Oxford: Clarendon, 2002.

The author develops a notion of value judgment that relies on responses felt in suitably qualified or experienced respondents that nonetheless answers to correctness conditions imposed by the relevant community of respondents.

### **Beauty and Morality**

The earliest philosophical writings on beauty concerned the best way to live. Typically through beauty, we construct the world as a place conducive to the human being’s needs and purposes. From Plato’s *Symposium* to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, through the Stoics to the medieval Persian and Arab philosophers, according to Gonzalez [2001](#), and to the Latin medieval philosophers, according to Eco [1988](#), experiences or perceptions of beauty were linked in various ways to the function (causes) and teleology (purposes) of the human being. According to Beiser [2009](#), Guyer [2005](#), and Norton [1995](#), the British and German philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries believed that the concepts of beauty conceived within empirical, rationalist, and Idealist worldviews all related to the way in which freedom and hence genuine morality were possible in an otherwise physical world. In the 20th century, attempts to relate aesthetic and moral value have relied on a range of approaches, many of which have historical foundations. The Kantian notion of an enlarged view promoted by aesthetic judgment can be found in a range of works, including Gadamer [1986](#) and Scarry [1999](#). A ubiquitous notion of moral beauty is articulated by McGinn [1997](#), according to which all beauty is really a projection or recognition of what we consider are qualities conducive to moral beauty. According to this view, the qualities of beauty are really qualities of the mind. But Ross 2010 gives a much clearer analysis of the way beauty is related to our capacity for moral meaning.

Beiser, Frederick C. *Diotima’s Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

A very useful discussion of 18th-century aesthetic rationalism is presented that reveals the embeddedness of taste—judgments of beauty—in the moral perspective.

Eco, Umberto. *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by Hugh Bredin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Places Aquinas within his historical and religious context, and shows that beauty refers to a way of loving and endorsing those aspects of the world that promote moral engagement with it.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Edited by Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

In responding to beauty, we are responding to qualities that attune us to our incorporation into the world and community and in this sense to morality. Unlike unphilosophical connotations of morality, morality is a sign of our freedom, our human agency where our actions originate in us rather than external causes.

Gonzalez, Valerie. *Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2001.

Reveals the role of conceptions of the divine in thinking about the nature of beauty in Persian and Arab medieval philosophers where perfection, harmony, and order were key concepts. Provides a revealing insight into the origin of ideas that relate beauty or taste to morality.

Guyer, Paul. *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Through a series of essays on Kant, and other historical figures before, contemporaneous with, and after Kant, Guyer discusses values associated with beauty such as taste, utility, ugliness, freedom, morality, ethics, originality, genius, pleasure, knowledge, and art.

McGinn, Colin. *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.

Develops the view found in certain 18th-century writers that the perception of beauty entails recognition of the qualities of the mind required to create or recognize it, and that these qualities are moral qualities.

Norton, Robert Edward. *The Beautiful Soul: Aesthetic Morality in the Eighteenth Century*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Argues that in the 18th century, the moral life was presented by some authors as its own reward, as aesthetically pleasurable. By the 19th century, however, the concept of moral beauty collapsed into a self-absorbed attempt at mental perfection at the cost of involvement in the practical world.

Ross, Alison. "The Moral Efficacy of Aesthetic Experience: Figures of Meaning in the Moral Field." *Critical Horizons* 11.3 (2010): 397-417.

A new, schematic analysis of the relation between beauty and ways of shaping the moral disposition is provided. Taking intersections between Kant's moral philosophy (particularly sections on moral pedagogy and methodology) and his aesthetic theory as a starting point, the paper argues that aesthetic mechanisms of marking and selection predate the moral disposition. The term "figuration" is used to identify the process of marking and selection whereby aspects of experience particularly of moral experience are given meaning.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Approaches the relation between morality and beauty as a matter of cultivating the appropriate enlarged perspective conducive to the impartial judgment required of a moral judgment.

## **Beauty Naturalized**

There are many ways to naturalize a theory of beauty. Appeals to evolutionary theory often result in reductive conceptions of beauty. For example, beauty might refer to environmental triggers that stimulate appetite to eat, procreate, or seek conditions that would enhance good health, a view that can be found in Denis Dutton's art theory (Dutton [2009](#)). Zeki [1999](#) and Ramachandran and Hirstein [1999](#), working in a subdiscipline the authors call neuro-aesthetics, reduce beauty to a series of hardwired responses, unfazed by the depressing conception of the human being that such a view supports. Davies [2012](#) canvases many such accounts but also considers evolutionary theories of art and beauty which are more anthropologically and ethnographically engaged. For example, Ellen Dissanayake argues that what we consider beautiful has its origins in the promotion of those conditions necessary for community (Dissanayake [1992](#), Dissanayake [2000](#)). Others like Peter Railton have attempted to explain values like beauty as having both a natural hardwired core and a particular cultural manifestation (Railton [1998](#)). The theory of contingent universals in film appreciation, as outlined in Bordwell [1996](#), would also qualify as such a conception. Research conducted into the human predilection for moderate ratios of fractal patterns could be considered relevant to explaining the hardwired core of aesthetic preference (Taylor, et al. [2000](#)). McMahon [2007](#) has unpacked and reconstructed Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment according to recent naturalized theories of mind, showing that such an approach can accommodate human agency.

Bordwell, David. "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision." In *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Edited by David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, 87–107. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

The author sets out a range of conventions in film direction, which he demonstrates through examples, have developed out of natural proclivities concerning our interactions with each other and the basics of communication. He refers to such conventions as "contingent universals."

Davies, Stephen. *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Davies analyses the various evolutionary adaptations that art and beauty might serve, including possible cultural manifestations of hardwired tendencies.

Dissanayake, Ellen. *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000.

Examines the infant's first attempt at communication including their carers' responses as creating the conditions for being a member of a community. The process involves the calibration of feeling and understanding by means other than the literal use of language. Dissanayake considers art as a formalization of this process and our natural disposition to appreciate beauty as its catalyst.

Dissanayake, Ellen. *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why*. New York: Free Press, 1992.

Provides an adaptive explanation for the human tendency to appreciate order, harmony, and pattern and the tendency to make artifacts that evoke this appreciation. This is related to the capacity humans have for motivating loyalty to a social group.

Dutton, Denis. *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2009.

Dutton grounds responses he deems relevant to art appreciation in evolutionary theory. In his account, the idea of the adaptive, maladaptive, and vestiges of adaptation underpin the psychology of art and beauty to a degree that cultural specificity is a superficial overlay, as is the relation of beauty to the moral disposition.

McMahon, Jennifer Anne. *Aesthetics and Material Beauty: Aesthetics Naturalized*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

A way of thinking about the principles underlying perceptual form construction and their categorization is provided that shows a naturalized base to Kant's harmony of the faculties and aesthetic ideas. The intentional aspect of aesthetic engagement is also accommodated within this naturalized theory of beauty.

Railton, Peter. "Aesthetic Value, Moral Value, and the Ambitions of Naturalism." In *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*. Edited by Jerrold Levinson, 59–105. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Comparison made between moral and aesthetic value drawing out their similarities and differences through a discussion of Hume's essay "Of the Standard of Taste." Railton concludes through grounding (rather than reducing) both kinds of value in naturalism, that there is a sense in which moral and aesthetic values are objective.

Ramachandran, Vilayanur, and William Hirstein. "The Science of Art." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6 (1999): 15–51.

Identifies a number of perceptual principles for determining which visual elements of the environment are noticed and how they are organized to elicit certain kinds of response. According to these authors, those arrangements that excite appetitive urges are what we call beautiful.

Taylor, Richard P., A. P. Micolich, and D. Jonas. "Using Science to Investigate Jackson Pollock's Drip Paintings." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7.8–9 (2000): 137–150.

The authors identify an appreciation of moderate ratios in fractal patterns as a natural basis to an artistic practice that eventually is adopted as a stylistic convention. It is also possibly a natural basis for experiences of beauty.

Zeki, Semir. *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

By considering human preferences for shapes, forms, and compositions in terms of neural structures in the brain and hardwired sensitivities and preferences, the author concludes that art which pleases exploits these hardwired sensitivities and preferences. Once Zeki moves beyond discussing visual elements, the discussion becomes conjectural.