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Aesthetics

Classic Readings from Western Tradition

Dabney Townsend

北京大学出版社
Peking University Press

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Second Edition

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序
——西方传统美学经典读本

要了解西方文化传统，不能不阅读这一传统的极富诱惑力的部分——美学。确实，以追究人生中的美、审美与艺术及其奥秘为特征的美学，是西方传统中与宇宙观、文化价值体系及文化精神关联最深的部分。对这一部分的追究，显然会有助我们整体地理解西方文化传统及其独特精神内涵。这部由汤森德(Dabney Townsend)编选的《美学经典选读》(Aesthetics: Classic Readings from the Western Tradition)第2版，正是一部合适的西方美学原著入门读物。

我个人觉得，这部读本有几个鲜明特色。首先是所选范围广泛，纵横欧美，跨越数千载，涵盖整个西方传统美学历程。全书分为三编。第一编古代及中世纪美学，收有柏拉图、亚里士多德、普罗提诺、波拿文都拉及但丁，第二编现代美学，属重头戏，分三辑：第一辑17、18世纪，收录哈奇生、休谟和康德，第二辑19世纪，收录黑格尔、叔本华、尼采、罗斯金、托尔斯泰。第三辑世纪转折期，收入克罗齐、布洛、贝尔。第三编20世纪美学，属于第2版特意增补的部分，收入本雅明、威茨、迪基、丹托。这样，全书选录丰富，厚达350余页，确实值得参考。其次，它不无道理地突出第二编现代美学的分量，那确实是西方美学达到巅峰的"黄金时代"的珍贵遗产。要了解"西方传统"(the western tradition)，这部分当然应多选。再次，为了方便读者阅读和理解，编者还在每篇选文之前精心撰写导读，言简意赅地介绍论者的学术背景及基本观点。最后，在每篇选文之后，还安排复习提问，可以方便初学者带着问题去阅读和思考，为他们进入西方美学殿堂架桥铺路。从这些特点看，此书确实在编选上体现了较大的合理性，具有重要的参考价值。

当然，编选上也有可商榷的地方。我觉得有些篇目该选的，却没选。19世纪的席勒(F. Schiller)在感性与理性的完满融会和审美教育、世纪转折期的狄尔泰(Wilhelm Dilthey)在审美的体验(lived experience)源泉、20世纪的弗洛伊德在美的功利性、海德格尔在艺术品的起源、伽达默尔在美的现实性及阐释学、鲍德里亚尔在消费文化及审美、哈贝马斯在"公共领域"和现代性及后现代性、杰姆逊在后现代美学等方面，都有重要贡献，有目共睹，但却省略了。反之，而我觉得不必要选的却选了。意大利神学家波拿文都拉、英语艺术批评家罗斯金、俄国作家托尔斯泰、美国分析家迪基和丹托，似在可选可不选之列。不过，这也不一定是缺点。编选者当然可以有自己的偏爱或取舍，这可以理解。读者如能从这些美学经典文选中见出西方传统美学的大致发展脉络，当不虚此行，而这部经典选本的价值也就可以实现了。

总之，这部选本富有特色，适合于相关专业的大学本科生、研究生和研究人员阅读。为使阅读效果更佳，不妨同时参考一两部合适的西方美学史著作，如吉尔伯特和库恩合著《美学史》、鲍桑葵著《美学史》(均已有中译本)。

王一川

2002年6月24日序于北京志新居

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Preface

The Purpose of This Anthology

This anthology begins with the assumption that our current awareness of art and the aesthetic is such that *aesthetics* is not a familiar term to most students. In approaching the subject for the first time, one needs to keep in mind that students do not really know what aesthetics is or even what the word means. To plunge directly into contemporary philosophical debates about art often leads to confusion and frustration. One effective way to answer the question "What is aesthetics?" is to pay attention to the development of the discipline through key texts in its history. The premise of this anthology, therefore, is that a selection of core historical texts can provide the kind of background that beginning students—undergraduate or graduate—need in order to understand what the issues in aesthetics are. What I have provided is not precisely a history of aesthetics, but the selection of texts does attempt to represent that history as a continuum.

The focus of the texts is limited to the western tradition because that is where philosophical aesthetics has developed. That does not imply that other art traditions should not be considered, nor that there are not interesting philosophical texts from non-western traditions that bear on aesthetics. But the historical and philosophical focus coincide in making the western tradition the most coherent and well developed one in aesthetics. For the introductory student, therefore, it provides the best starting place.

The Major Features of the Text

In this day of expanded electronic resources and convenient copying, one must consider whether an anthology still has a place in the design of an aesthetics course. Most anthologies that are available today seek to be comprehensive. Typically, they try to include something for everyone and a bit of everything. The result is a very large volume whose expense precludes the purchase of any other text. But while that kind of anthology was needed when the only aesthetics books undergraduates would have

were the ones that they would buy, today an instructor can place on the Web or in course packets favorite essays and supplement whatever basic texts are assigned quite economically.

In teaching aesthetics to undergraduates and to humanities students outside philosophy through the graduate level, I concluded that a different kind of anthology would be useful. It would focus on those historically significant essays that provide a needed background for the study of philosophical aesthetics and it would be relatively compact. That leaves the instructor free to assign a basic introductory aesthetics textbook or to choose additional contemporary essays for a small course packet while still keeping the cost of the course reasonable.

This anthology is addressed to beginning students in aesthetics. For undergraduates, this will likely be a first course in aesthetics and perhaps even a first course in philosophy. But many students do not encounter aesthetics until they begin some form of graduate study. Aesthetic questions may arise in philosophy courses, in art history and art appreciation courses, or in any area of the humanities. I have tried to provide the kind of selections that can serve as both a beginning and a reference. Thus, the selections in this anthology have been chosen to illustrate a range of approaches in an historical context. I have chosen texts that are obvious and frequently referred to where possible, but I have also included some less well-known selections, such as those from Bonaventure and Dante, in order to show the connections between the ancient and modern worlds.

The selections are classics in aesthetics, but they do not represent my preferred solutions to aesthetic problems. (As with any philosopher, I do not pretend neutrality. I have my own position. I doubt, however, that anyone will be able to infer what it is from these texts.) Many of the positions represented in these texts are incompatible. Philosophy advances by engaging in such disagreements. These theories illustrate not an end but a beginning to an investigation. Aesthetics as a discipline can be regarded as the sum of these possibilities. It remains an open-ended, developing study that will continue to change as art and its audience changes.

Pedagogical Aids

In addition to providing a compact and representative historical selection of texts, I have tried to make the readings as accessible as possible by providing a number of special pedagogical aids.

Introductions. First, a general introduction to each part and section explains the historical setting and provides continuity. Then each selection is introduced individually. The purpose of these introductions is not to provide summaries that students can use in place of reading for themselves but to highlight questions, presuppositions, and context so that the text does not stand in isolation. I have tried to presuppose as little technical philosophical jargon as possible in the introductions. Inevitably, however, basic classical texts do make use of a technical vocabulary. While one can hardly supply a complete discussion of such general terms as *idealism* or *dialectic* in an introduction, some guidance must be provided for the beginner. The introductions serve that purpose.

Annotations. Second, I have annotated each selection. Many of the selections are dense in references to specific facts, works of art, and artists. If one could presume a highly educated audience, those references might be intelligible. For today's student, however, figures from classical history and literature or technical terms from the arts and philosophy are likely to be mysterious. Annotations can dispel some of that mystery.

Questions for Discussion and Review. Third, for each selection I have provided questions for discussion and review. These questions serve two pedagogical purposes.

- They provide a starting point for discussion. Some are intended specifically to get the student to think about alternate applications of the theory in question, for example.
- The questions also provide a kind of reading guide. Sometime the organization of a selection will not be obvious to a student. By providing a set of leading questions, the student can be led to see the key points in the text. I have found that questions are better for this purpose than an outline.

Passages for Discussion. Finally, the very compactness of this anthology presents a problem because innumerable important authors and special formulations could not be included. I have found, for example, that I often need a classic definition such as Aquinas's definition of beauty or Keats's description of "negative capability" in the course of a lecture or discussion. To meet this need, I have provided "Passages for Discussion" that offers some provocative or well-known statements. These passages serve three purposes:

- They suggest further reading.
- They provide needed examples and quotations.
- They can act as starting points for discussion.

These pedagogical aids will, I hope, make this anthology more useful than a simple collection of texts.

New in the Second Edition

As noted, the emphasis of this anthology is upon making available a set of texts from the history of philosophical aesthetics in a form sufficiently compact to allow the instructor some room for additions. For that reason, the first edition stopped with the end of the extended nineteenth century—World War I. The twentieth century is rich in interesting texts. I have my favorites that I always use, and I am sure that other specialists in the field have theirs. But everyone who teaches a course in aesthetics is not a specialist in the field. Comments have indicated that many users would like for this anthology to be the primary text for their course, and for that purpose, an introduction to the twentieth century is needed. This second edition expands Part III to meet that need. In order to retain the original historical orientation and relatively compact size, Part III offers two new features:

A New Introduction. The introduction to this part is more extensive than the other introductions. It surveys the different philosophical approaches to aesthetics in the twentieth century. It also provides footnotes that act as a guide to further reading. While these cannot be comprehensive, they should allow both the student and the instructor to pursue particular topics or approaches on their own as they choose.

New Selections. I have added four representative selections from the mid-twentieth century. The rationale for these selections is slightly different from those of the earlier parts. Because time has done the sorting process for us, it is relatively easy to identify classic texts in the history of aesthetics and representative movements. In the century that we have just completed, that sorting process is still ongoing. I think, however, that some important shifts are obvious. I have chosen four texts that will help students understand those shifts.

- **Walter Benjamin's "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"** demonstrates the difference in emphasis in continental European and Anglo-American aesthetics. It is more sociological and ideological, and it approaches philosophy from a cultural perspective. It also offers an example of a politically engaged form of philosophy.
- **Morris Weitz's "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics"** was a seminal work in bringing the influence of one of the leading twentieth-century philosophers, Ludwig Wittgenstein, into aesthetics. Wittgenstein's work marks a major shift in the way that Anglo-American philosophy is conceived, and Weitz brings that shift to the fore for aesthetics.
- **George Dickie's "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude"** marks a similar shift in the basic presuppositions of twentieth-century aesthetics. It challenges the dominant assumption that aesthetic experience is psychologically unique and that an aesthetic attitude is a necessary condition for aesthetic experience. Dickie also represents a renewed interest in the history of aesthetics as a way to understand contemporary problems.
- **Arthur Danto's "The Artworld"** was an important turning point in the way that aesthetic theory was reconstituted after the challenge of Wittgenstein. If the assumptions about aesthetic experience and an aesthetic attitude are misleading and if the dominant way of philosophizing about aesthetics by a combination of philosophical analysis of definitions and psychological analysis of experience is challenged by the followers of Wittgenstein, then Danto's emphasis on the interaction of theory and the practice of art offers a significant new direction.

These new selections will, I believe, make it possible for this anthology to serve as the primary text for an undergraduate course. While they cannot be considered exhaustive, they suggest the continued development of aesthetics.

I offer this selection of texts as evidence of the deep and perennial interest of aesthetics to philosophers of the first rank. If Plato and Aristotle, David Hume and Immanuel Kant, and a host of other philosophers and critics have written about aesthetics in ways that are central to their philosophy, then we are justified in thinking that aesthetics may continue to be important to us as well.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank a number of people who have helped in the preparation of this anthology. Gary Hagberg of Bard College read the initial prospectus and a first draft of the whole work. He provided helpful input and encouragement when it was needed. Robert Ginsberg provided a thorough editorial reading of the introductions and many helpful suggestions in addition to early copyediting. I have followed his advice in many places. Arnold Berleant and Arthur Bartlett made useful suggestions. My colleagues at the University of Texas at Arlington, Tim Mahoney and Charles Chiasson, read the classical introductions and notes and saved me from several errors. Tim Mahoney and Sherry Blum of the University of Texas at Austin also provided a new translation of the Plotinus section. Daniel Herwitz, Tom Leddy, Richard Wollheim, Gene Blocker, Anita Silver, and Hilde Hein all read the manuscript and provided useful suggestions as well as specific corrections. For this second edition, readers for Wadsworth have commented on both the organization and the content. It is to them that I owe the impetus for the new selections. I hope that my choices will meet with their approval. Peter Adams, Mindy Newfarmer, and the editorial staff at Wadsworth have been patient and helpful. Billie Hughes typed and retyped the reading selections. Finally, my students in aesthetics have used various versions of this anthology. They have taught me as much as I have taught them. I thank them all.

Needless to say, the individuals named are not responsible for the deficiencies that remain in this anthology. The blame when I have remained stubbornly heedless of their advice is mine alone. Nothing in philosophy can be everything to everyone. I can only hope that using this book will stimulate some of the same excitement that I feel for aesthetics and its history.

Contents

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PART ONE

Classical and Medieval Aesthetics

AESTHETICS IS A MODERN TERM. It entered our philosophical vocabulary in the eighteenth century. Art and its effects attracted the attention of thinkers virtually from the beginning of Western thought, however. Art is so closely associated with the central cultural and religious forms of life in the classical world that it was inevitably the subject of speculation and comment as soon as philosophers began to write. Moreover, *beauty* was a central philosophical term in a way that we have to recover if we are to understand classical philosophy. In the classical world, art was seldom mere entertainment in our contemporary, escapist sense. Works of art were not valued "for themselves" in the way that our museum-culture promotes. Drama, even in its comic and satiric modes, was a part of cultural and religious festivals. Sculpture and painting provided memorials for the dead and images for the gods. The undoubted and widespread forms of decoration that we know in classical houses and utilitarian objects served to link everyday life to the fabric of myth. Even art that was merely to be looked at served a function; it commemorated events and brought honor and prestige to its owners and patrons. Therefore, art and beauty naturally attracted the comment of philosophers who sought to understand central cultural forms.

Beauty was even more important than art to classical philosophers. Different standards and ideals of beauty prevail in different cultures. The particular natural and artistic forms that are pleasing to me and the way that I describe them need not be the same as they were to the citizens of Athens in the fifth century B.C.E.[1] Some emotional responses seem to be very widespread, however. The pleasure that I take in a sunset or a landscape provides a shared link across cultural boundaries and temporal distance. We are not so different that we do not understand and respond in similar ways. The greatest difference is in the concepts we use to describe our responses. In classical thought, beauty is not understood simply as an emotion. It is a value closely linked

[1] Dating inevitably is culturally relative. B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) has the slight advantage of being less theologically arrogant than the older B.C. (Before Christ) though it amounts to the same thing. This style allows dates for our current era to stand without the older A.D. (*Anno Domini*, "year of Our Lord") designation without confusion.

with truth and the good. Beauty is understood as a property of the highest forms of being in the world itself. It is associated with harmony and order. When classical writers sought to understand the order of the world, they included beauty in their investigations. They believed that beauty informed the intellect as well as the senses. Beauty must be a topic for consideration for anyone who seeks to understand the place of human beings in the cosmos.

Classical writers lacked a systematic approach to what we call aesthetic phenomena in their own right. Aesthetics was incorporated into discussions of politics, knowledge, religion, and morality. The integration of the aesthetic into larger discussions has the virtue of showing the relevance of art to life. Only rarely was classical aesthetics the province of a small class of "aesthetes" devoted only to the enjoyment of sensation. Consequently, we must look for discussions of aesthetic topics in the context of other issues. Context is always important.

One additional source for classical aesthetics should be considered. The word *art* implies not only the kind of things that we classify as works of art; it also implies craft —knowledge of how to do or make something. Many of the interesting comments on art by classical writers are from the practical standpoint of how to make something that works the way it is supposed to work. This perspective is particularly true of rhetorical works. The art of speaking was a preeminent professional skill in a world without printing. The law, church, court, and tradition all depended on oral performance and rhetorical persuasion. Classical writers studied and employed a detailed array of technical devices. The link between persuasion and aesthetics is often close.

Tradition says that Plato was a poet before turning to philosophy. Discussions of art, poetry, criticism, and rhetoric are scattered throughout the Platonic dialogues. The sustained attention to poetry and the function of the poet in the *Republic* has been one of the most central and influential in the history of philosophy. Aristotle devoted a whole treatise to rhetoric, but his compact discussion of tragedy in the *Poetics* is even more central to aesthetics. It is at once a rhetoric of drama and an analysis of what makes up a poetic imitation. The followers of Plotinus form the school of neo-Platonism.[2] Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, neo-Platonism provided the framework for a chain of being that was thought to link all elements of the universe into an organic whole. Beauty is taken by neo-Platonists to be a central property of that organism. The discussion of beauty by Plotinus provides the most effective answer in the classical world to Plato's challenge to the arts in the *Republic*.

With the decline of the western Roman empire in the early Middle Ages, art and speculation about it became even more localized in particular institutions. We must always be careful not to project our concepts of "art" and "aesthetic feeling" back onto cultural situations where those concepts and practices did not exist. Art flourished, but it belonged to the church, the court, and special civic institutions. Artists practiced a craft or were scholars, monks or traveling poets. Philosophical treatments of art are found in the context of theology and mystical writings. A medieval "aesthetic" exists in continuity with its classical roots. It is built on harmony and proportion, a love of color and form, and a deep sense that symbols project significance beyond their individual appearance.

[2] For a discussion of neo-Platonism, see the introduction to the Plotinus reading selection on p. 44.

Neo-Platonism continued to be influential in a Christianized form through the Middle Ages. It was transmitted through two primary sources and a multitude of influences and unacknowledged references. The two most important sources were the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and the sixth-century Syrian monk whose work was taken to be by Paul's disciple Dionysius the Areopagite. Augustine incorporated many Platonic elements in his theology. In particular, he was able to use the neo-Platonic concept of spiritual being to solve problems about the existence of evil and the incorporeal nature of God. In aesthetics, this concept made available the hierarchical movement which found harmony in the whole universe and beauty as its object. Pseudo-Dionysius[3] presented parts of earlier neo-Platonists directly in the guise of Christian doctrine. Divine names and a form of dialectical negation opened the hierarchy to speculation. Both Augustine and pseudo-Dionysius distrusted beauty itself, however. It was too pagan. Christian writers throughout the Middle Ages struggled with the competing claims of beauty as the highest value and the tendency of asceticism to distrust anything that was too sensual. Only medieval mysticism was able truly to embrace both at once.

Later medieval philosophers and theologians reintroduced Aristotle's criticisms of Plato. Neo-Platonism remained influential, but it took more concrete, individualistic forms in response to Aristotle's unification of form and sense. In the Renaissance, an increasing emphasis on experience, artistic expression, and individual achievement and skill shifted aesthetics away from beauty as a divine harmony toward beauty as a felt, sensual first step toward a higher consciousness. The aesthetic payoff of art was something that an individual could feel rather than an intellectual union of individual minds with the divine mind. Changes in the philosophy of beauty paralleled a changing status and function of art. No matter how skilled, medieval artists were largely anonymous conduits for a divine inspiration. As first Aristotelianism and then a revised neo-Platonism took hold, artists appeared as individuals whose skill exhibited their own perceptions as well as those communicated to them. Most of the elements remained the same, but artists now produced individual works about individual objects for individual consumers. The aesthetic in its modern sense—a science of feeling as such—became possible.

Based on its strong sense of individualism and humanism, Renaissance art rejected medieval scholasticism. The Aristotelian-Thomist model for philosophy had emphasized logical deduction and an otherworldly subordination of the individual to God's plan. Renaissance writers tended to reject that model (though generalization is suspect in a period of such cultural diversity), but they continued to rely on its more neo-Platonic elements. What was to be put in place of the medieval models was less clear. Many Renaissance theorists and artists thought of themselves as returning to the clarity of classical models, even if their understanding of those models was much different from that of their originators. One of the intramural battles in this struggle for new

[3]The works attributed to Dionysius the Aereopagite were in fact probably written or compiled in the sixth century in Syria. They include large sections taken directly from the later neo-Platonist Proclus (410–485). Although the attribution to a disciple of Paul was challenged as early as the twelfth century, these writings retained their influence as near-canonical works through the Middle Ages. Their author is commonly referred to as "pseudo-Dionysius" today.

forms was between the ancients and the moderns. Defenders of the ancients looked back to Greece and Rome for the models of culture. Defenders of the moderns pointed to the new achievements in science and art as improvements on the antique world. One side thought everything new a descent from the standards of a golden age. The other saw itself standing on the shoulders of giants, reaching higher and higher. Writers on art entered into this battle with vigor, but the battle was largely intramural. The aesthetic principles applied by both sides were drawn from classical and medieval sources. Then and now, artistic practice often runs ahead of theory.

The selections in Part I show the principal classical theories of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. Then Bonaventure illustrates briefly the way that neo-Platonism informed the High Middle Ages, and Dante shows how a transformation already had begun to take place by the beginning of the fourteenth century even though medieval theology continued to shape his literary form. The passages for discussion at the end offer additional points of reference from the Renaissance as well as from earlier writers.

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