

## Introduction: What is Aesthetics?

**The Term:** Aesthetics was originally coined by Alexander Baumgarten in his book *Reflections on Poetry* (1735) as the name for one of two branches of the study of knowledge, that is, for the study of sensory experience coupled with feeling, which he argued was a different kind of knowledge from ideas studied by logic. The term has come to refer to a set of investigations concerning beauty, the arts, and their values, as well as modes of cognition related to them. The English word "aesthetics" is from the Greek term "*aesthetikos*" or "*aisthanomai*" meaning sensory perception or to perceive (hence, anesthetic is that medicine which decreases or eliminates sense perception).

**Aesthetic Questions:** Is there a special attitude, the aesthetic attitude, which we should take toward works of art and the natural environment, and what is that attitude like? Is there a distinctive type of experience, an aesthetic experience, and what is it? Is there a special object of attention that we can call an aesthetic object? Is there a distinctive value, aesthetic value, comparable with moral, epistemological and religious values?

These questions overlap with questions about the philosophy of art? What is beauty? What is taste and how might it be involved in judging the aesthetic character and value of natural objects and works of art?

**Definitions:** There have been several proposals concerning the object of aesthetics. Determining the object of aesthetics will in turn determine the character, methods, problems, etc. that aesthetics as a discipline seeks to investigate.

1. Aesthetics is the theory or philosophy of beauty or the beautiful.

Most common understanding. Greek: *Kalologia*

B. Bosanquet (*History of Aesthetics*, 1892): "Aesthetics means the philosophy of the beautiful."

E. Meumann, "Science of beauty in nature and the arts."

But what is beauty? What about the work of art itself? What about aesthetic experience?

Key critique: Since beauty is a subjective one and is dependent on factors like individual or collective taste and relative conditions, any theory of beauty is a subjective one and is therefore impossible.

2. Aesthetics is the theory of aesthetic experience and satisfaction.

Here a. is considered a part of psychology (hence psychological aesthetics) and it deals with the investigation of the essential features, laws, conditions, of the behaviour of the human subject experiencing a work of art; the description of reactions and feelings as they are expressed.

So Hume, Burke, Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, Gilson (who said that a. is the science of the experience of the beautiful).

Here a. as a part of psychology becomes a science, but loses its autonomy; also it omits questions concerning the work of art, classification of art, etc.

3. Aesthetics is the theory of aesthetic judgment.

The judgment of appreciation especially as the end process of aesthetic experience. It covers the investigation of its conditions, objective and subjective and can cover the entire domain of aesthetic issues.

4. Aesthetics is the philosophy of art.

So Hegel and Benedetto Croce and T. Munro who said that aesthetics studies: a. the work of art; b. the process of producing and experiencing art; c. certain aspects of nature and human production outside the field of art. There is always a close connection between art and aesthetics. This is very popular position.

5. Aesthetics is metacriticism.

M. C. Beardsley develops this theory in the context of the view of aesthetics as a philosophy of art. He distinguishes between aesthetics as a field of study and as a field of knowledge. Aesthetics is a metacriticism while the work of art is immediately investigated by the criticism itself. Beardsley says it investigates problems:

that arise when we make a serious effort to say something true and warranted about a work of art.

It consists of a field of knowledge as those principles that are required for clarifying and confirming critical statements (analytic?).

Aesthetics is a philosophy of criticism or metacriticism.

6. Aesthetics is the encounter of an experiencing subject with an object, esp. a work of art.

It is the philosophical theory of encounter between the work of art and its perceiver. This encounter is the source of developing aesthetic experience and the constitution of the aesthetic object. Analysis of this encounter opens the way to the manifestation of all the phenomena important for aesthetics and makes possible a precise elaboration of the basic notions which are the following:

- Ontology of works of art.
- Ontology of the aesthetic object.
- Phenomenology of the creative process or the creative behaviour of the artist.
- Phenomenology of the style of the work of art and of the relation between this style and the values
- Ontology and phenomenology of artistic and aesthetic values.
- Phenomenology of the aesthetic experience
- Epistemology of the work of art and its aesthetic concretization; epistemology of the artistic and aesthetic values; theory of the criticism of evaluation.
- Philosophical inquiry or theory of the meaning and function of art in human life.

7. Aesthetics is based on cybernetics or in theories of communication.

The relation of artist to art work and art to perceiver is the subject matter of a. in theories based on cybernetics or in theories of communication. A. has to do with the relation between the source of information (artist), information (art work), and its receiver (audience). The problems of a. become the problems of communication theory. In works of art there are pieces of information which can be interpreted if and only if he knows the code and system of symbols thru which they have been sent. So Umberto Eco.

8. Aesthetics is the study of aesthetic value.

Aesthetic value is something that can be discovered and described as different from other values (moral or religious) and whose essence is discovered in phenomenological analysis. In each aesthetic values there is a specific quality which determines that it is an aesthetic value. So G. Santayana.

9. Synthetic or eclectic proposals of aesthetics.

Modes of behaviour and experience both overt and internal, skills, responses to stimuli, the processes involved in creating, producing, or performing art and those involved in perceiving, appreciating, using,

enjoying, evaluating, understanding, teaching or otherwise dealing with it. Aesthetic enjoyment and creation, beauty and art, belong inseparably together.

The function of art is to present the beauty which emerges from an aesthetic situation and is received in a similar attitude. The unitary science of both these mental states, as well as of the beautiful and its special forms of art and its kinds is covered by the one name aesthetics.

Aesthetics is understood as including all studies of the arts and related types of experience from philosophic, scientific or other theoretical standpoints, including those of psychology, sociology, ethnology, cultural history, art criticism, and education.

That part of philosophy which deals with problems arising mainly out of the existence of beautiful things and men's response to their beauty; out of artistic activities, and men's responses to them; and out of the intellectual activities connected therewith.

Aesthetic objects, aesthetic judgment, aesthetic existence; the theory of beauty, the theory of art, aesthetic objects, aesthetic experience, employing both description and perception, both analysis and explanation.