

Being Acquainted

Ethics and Aesthetics in Interpersonal Life

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Chapter Abstracts

Chapter 1. Stigma in the aesthetics of friendship

Here I sketch the role that aesthetic impressions play in our interpersonal lives, and outline our practices of valuing one another on the basis of perceived aesthetic qualities (our practices of *interpersonal aesthetic valuing*). I then give voice to the *beauty problematic*, i.e. the matrix of stigmas and prejudices that pervades society, threatening to undermine the presuppositions of our practices of interpersonal aesthetic valuing by showing those practices to be based on distortions, to be in-apt, and to be themselves deeply harmful features of our social world.

Chapter 2. Non-ideal aesthetic theory

Here I respond to two parts of the beauty problematic. First by setting out the conceptual connection between beauty and character which explains how, in an ideal world, aesthetic appreciation of a person could be a sound basis for interpersonal valuing attitudes. Second, by arguing that the unreliability of aesthetic judgements in the non-ideal context of systems of stigma and prejudice can, in principle, be remedied by a programme of ideology critique which articulates and disseminates a thorough-going critical understanding of those systems of stigma and prejudice.

Chapter 3. The avowal of feelings

The benevolence condition, discussed in chapter one, was a presupposition of our practices of attending to and appreciating one another's aesthetic qualities, and allowing such appreciation to affect our feelings about one another. It was the presupposition that such practices are, on balance, valuable features of our social lives. In this and the following three chapters I defend the benevolence condition by arguing that appreciation of the qualities of others is constitutive of some of the fundamental goods of social life including recognition and communion, and that, moreover, the relevant qualities are pervasively aesthetic. This chapter advances a presumptive argument for the much-maligned *qualities view* (QV) about the rationality of love, according to which love is justified by reference to the love-worthy qualities of the beloved. The presumptive argument rests on the value that deliberative avowal brings to love – a value that the QV's various anti-rationalist rivals cannot explain.

Chapter 4. Appreciation and fungibility

This chapter presses the similarity between aesthetic appreciation, and interpersonal love. I take up and respond to the oft-rehearsed trading-up objection to the QV, as well as some closely related objections. The problems typically identified by the objection arise from the idea that love-worthy qualities could be coarse-grained, when in fact they must be fine-grained. The analogy with appreciation of aesthetic qualities helps to draw out this point. Once the fine-grained nature of love-worthy qualities is properly understood, it is clear that critics of the QV cannot rely on the trading-up objection to motivate its rejection. The chapter's core argument begins to illuminate the persistently aesthetic nature of interpersonal affections.

Chapter 5. The peculiar allure of another's aesthetic worldview

In this chapter, I argue that interest in another's aesthetic worldview – which requires attention to their personal aesthetic qualities – has a distinctive and weighty value for many kinds of relationship. My argument proceeds by first establishing that a key part of the kind of intimacy that is valuable to many personal relationships is parties' appreciation of core aspects of one another's personalities. The question then becomes whether it is valuable for one's aesthetic worldview to be such a core aspect. In response, I offer some plausible assumptions about the importance of an aesthetic worldview for creativity, and for autonomous agency more generally. In light of these considerations, it appears that both our aesthetic worldviews, and interpersonal interest in them, are deeply valuable to individual and social life.

Chapter 6. Aesthetic mediation

This chapter extends the discussion of aesthetic worldviews, bringing it to bear on the rationalistic conception of love developed in chapters 3 and 4. I argue that as self-conscious beings, the qualities of ourselves that we tacitly present to others for evaluation are mediated by our own aesthetic worldviews. As a result, all of the kinds of qualities that can favour interpersonal valuing-attitudes are the appropriate objects of distinctly aesthetic appreciation. This view encourages a picture of communion – time spent self-consciously in the company of another person – as centrally involving interpersonal aesthetic appreciation.

Chapter 7. The musicality of speech

Having completed the abstract argument for the view that the beauty problematic can and should be overcome, this chapter returns to the phenomenological texture of interpersonal life. I consider aesthetic appraisal of speech as an example of the many (and the many non-visual) aesthetic

dimensions of interpersonal experience. I draw attention to the often ignored ways in which stigma and prejudice in the auditory sphere can mar social relations, before defending the view that despite such ideological conditions, aesthetic qualities like speakers' lyricism are the kinds of qualities that we ought to be attuned to in one another.

Chapter 8. Tactile interpersonal experience

In this final chapter, I discuss the interplay between ideology-critique, and interpersonal aesthetic appreciation, in the context of tactile interpersonal experience. Some have thought of tactile experience as too primordial, or too immanent, to be permeated by ideology. One might also think of touch as too bodily, and too animalistic, to be of relevance to appreciation of a person as a person. Against both of these lines of thought I argue that many kinds of interpersonal touch are best understood on the model of communion developed in the earlier chapters.