

Mohan Matthen
Zachary Weinstein

Aesthetic Hedonism

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Introduction

Hedonism is the view that pleasure is the only thing that has final, or non-derivative, value: other things are valuable only to the extent that they produce pleasure. In this context, pleasure may be narrowly conceived as an agreeable sensation, or functionally as a psychological response that reinforces a subject's propensity to perform the action that evokes the response. (Critics of aesthetic hedonism [AH] have often assumed the former, but criticism narrowly based on this conception does not work when leveled against a functional conception.) Either way, it makes value depend on human response, not on objective qualities. AH applies this thesis to *aesthetic* value, holding that it derives from *aesthetic* pleasure. AH runs contrary to objectivism—the idea that aesthetic value is independent of the value of experience (experience being, at most, an apprehension of value). AH starts from the fact that human beings “like” art; aesthetic value is then understood as the instrumental value of giving them what they like. However, great tragedy arouses negative emotions, and the best art is cognitively difficult to understand. These are psychological barriers to engagement and appreciation. AH must show why these barriers do not reduce value. Most aesthetic hedonists address the difficulty by delimiting the scope either of hedonism or of aesthetic pleasure. Some, e.g. Hume, say that art must be valued relative to the response of somebody who has been sufficiently exposed to it, and has thus developed “taste”; only the pleasure that such subjects take in art is probative. Others, e.g. Kant, posit a special kind of pleasure characteristic of aesthetic appreciation. This, he says, is “disinterested,” and thus different from the mere “agreeability” of food and sex, and also of low art—it is, nevertheless, a form of pleasure. In other treatments, other human motivations are invoked, including emotional immersion in Indian “*rasa*” theory, social harmony in Confucius, forms of eroticism (an idea that traces back to Plato), Freudian negative impulses such as the death wish, and vitalistic life forces. These are not forms of hedonism in the strict sense, but they are founded on human response, and so they are anti-objectivist in tenor. More recently, ideas from other areas of philosophy—specifically philosophy of mind and value theory—have been employed for and against AH, including nontraditional ways of understanding the nature of pleasure. The authors would like to acknowledge research support from the Australian Research Council DP 150103143 as part of

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General Overviews

Van der Berg (2019) is a comprehensive review of AH, though from a critical perspective. Lopes [2018](#) is the only other overview specifically devoted to AH. The broad issues of hedonism (closely related to what is sometimes called “empiricism”) and aesthetic value are treated in a number of scene-setting introductory articles. The most specific treatment is Stecker [2004](#). Herwitz [2014](#) is an excellent historical treatment of aesthetic pleasure and Zangwill [2014](#) contains a useful discussion of how normative aesthetic judgments relate to subjective responses. Treatments of the role of pleasure in aesthetic responses to art are also embedded in Guyer [2005](#), Shelley [2013](#), and Korsmeyer [2013](#).

Guyer, Paul. “History of Modern Aesthetics.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Edited by Jerrold Levinson, 25–60. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Indispensable historical overview of theories of aesthetic experience.

Herwitz, Daniel. “Pleasure.” In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. 2d ed. Edited by M. Kelly. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

A survey of theories of aesthetic pleasure from Early Modern European philosophy to the present.

Korsmeyer, Carolyn. “Taste.” In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*. 3d ed. Edited by B. Gaut and D. M. Lopes, 193–202. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Discusses a variety of theories of aesthetic evaluation based on the enjoyment that an object affords to a person of good taste, thematizing the gustatory metaphor.

Lopes, Dominic McIver. “To Seize upon the Applause of the Heart.” In *Being for Beauty*. By Dominic McIver Lopes, 53–70. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Though embedded within a book that argues against AH, this chapter is a sympathetic standalone overview of AH.

Shelley, James. “Empiricism: Hutcheson and Hume.” In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*. 3d ed. Edited by B. Gaut and D. M. Lopes, 37–49. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Historical introduction to views in British empiricism that ground aesthetic value in the experience that objects evoke.

Stecker, Robert. “Value in Art.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Edited by J. Levinson, 307–324. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

General introduction to questions of value in art, including an excellent discussion of theories based on aesthetic experience, more generally, and those based on pleasure.

Van der Berg, Servaas. “Aesthetic Hedonism and its Critics.” *Philosophy Compass* 2019; e12645. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12645>

An excellent entry point into the subject. According to the author, AH is the “dominant view of aesthetic value;” this assessment rests on a broad conception of pleasure-based response. Though the author believes that its “privileged status . . . is detrimental to downstream research,” he gives a remarkably fair and thorough treatment.

Zangwill, Nick. “[Aesthetic Judgment](#).” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2014.

Discusses judgments of beauty and other aesthetic qualities, discussing in particular the centrality of pleasure and of reactions to it.

The Nature of Aesthetic Pleasure

Up until the end of the 18th century, the main strategies for accommodating the supposed superiority of difficult art were to posit either a refined attitude called “taste” (see [Hutcheson and Hume](#) and [Korsmeyer 2013](#), cited under [General Overviews](#)), or a special kind of “disinterested” attitude toward beautiful objects that valorizes their form independently of the desire for them to be materially instantiated. [Herwitz 2014](#) provides an excellent overview of these historical developments, and the subsequent introduction of other determinants of aesthetic response. (For further treatment of the early history, see [Hutcheson and Hume](#) and [Kant](#).) [Matravers 2003](#) and [Zuckert 2007](#) are important discussions, in contemporary terms, of the Kantian approach. More recently, concepts in other areas of philosophy of mind and value theory have been reconfigured and applied to aesthetic pleasure. [Walton 1993](#) and [Gorodeisky 2018](#) suggest (in different ways) that aesthetic pleasure is an affectively positive apprehension of objective value. [Scruton 1979](#) posits non-sensuous, intellectual, pleasures. [Schaper 1983](#) introduces a distinction between pleasures of aesthetic experience and pleasures of taste. [Brady 1998](#) articulates a pleasurable, disinterested state involved in our appreciation of nature. [Matthen 2017](#) draws on the psychology of reward and reward-based learning to explain how aesthetic pleasure reinforces engagement with cognitively and affectively difficult art.

[Brady, Emily](#). “Don’t Eat the Daisies: Disinterestedness and the Situated Aesthetic.” *Environmental Values* 7 (1998): 97–114.

A clear and interesting treatment of disinterestedness as the aesthetic value-maker, recognizing that it is a form of “liking” or pleasure, but one that is free of both personal interest and subjectivity. Defends disinterestedness from charges that it is nonaffective and that it is formalistic.

[Gorodeisky, Keren](#). “Rationally Agential Pleasure? A Kantian Proposal.” In *Pleasure: A History*. Edited by [Lisa Shapiro](#), 167–194. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

A development of Kant’s view of aesthetic pleasure, in which it is a reaction to rational apprehension of an object’s qualities. As such it is neither non-rational (like mere sentiment) nor purely descriptive (like rational cognition). “The grounds of aesthetic pleasure . . . are those in light of which aesthetic judgment legitimately and justifiably ‘determines that pleasure or displeasure must be combined with the representation of the object’ . . .” (p. 173).

[Herwitz, Daniel](#). “Pleasure.” In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. 2d ed. Edited by [M. Kelly](#). New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

A wide-ranging survey of attitudes to aesthetic pleasure, starting with Hume and Kant (on whom see more in their respective sections), somewhat focused on Continental treatments. Herwitz recounts vitalistic and erotic takes on aesthetic pleasure, and then its intertwining with pain in psychoanalytic theories. “By the twentieth century the aesthetics of pleasure had shifted from a general attitude (taste) . . . to a direct encounter with art and its energies.”

Matravers, Derek. “The Aesthetic Experience.” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 158–174.

Explanation and defense of Kant’s idea that aesthetic delight is different from both sensual agreeability and intellectual approval.

Matthen, Mohan. “The Pleasure of Art.” *Australasian Philosophical Review* 1.1 (2017): 6–28.

A functional view of aesthetic pleasure in which it arises out of and motivates the continuation of mental engagement with an object (cp. Zuckert [2007](#)). Mental engagement with art-objects is cognitively difficult, which is a barrier to enjoyment. But certain ways of engaging with categories of art-object lead to greater rewards. Audiences learn to engage with objects in these ways, and are motivated by the resultant pleasure to take on the cost.

Schaper, Eva. “The Pleasures of Taste.” In *Pleasure, Preference and Value*. By Eva Schaper, 39–56. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Through a discussion of Kant and Hume, argues that there is a specific pleasure of taste, distinct from pleasures of aesthetic experience. Pleasures of taste are “occasioned by an aesthetic appraisal” (p. 55).

Scruton, Roger. “Experiencing Architecture.” In *The Aesthetics of Architecture*. 66–95. London: Methuen, 1979.

Introduces a distinction between intellectual and sensuous pleasure, and argues that the pleasure we take in art is of the former kind. See chapter 4.

Walton, Kendall. “How Marvelous! Toward a Theory of Aesthetic Value.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51.3 (1993): 499–510.

Aesthetic pleasure is pleasure taken in one’s positive evaluation of a skilled human accomplishment, relative to certain standards of evaluation. Aesthetic value is the capacity to elicit aesthetic pleasure *properly*, given certain absolute moral or practical values, and also others that “bootstrap” off these, but are specific to an art form. Reprinted as chapter 1 (pp. 3–20) of Walton’s *Marvelous Images* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Zuckert, Rachel. “Aesthetic Pleasure: The Feeling of Subjective, Projective Temporality.” In *Kant on Beauty and Biology* 231–278. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

An illuminating development of Kant’s view that aesthetic pleasure is not a sensation, but rather an appreciation of “purposiveness without a purpose.” Pleasure is a second-order state of a subject that arises out of an occurrent state and seeks to maintain the latter. *Aesthetic* pleasure is pleasure that seeks continuation, but is not genuinely purposive since it is taken in contemplating the form of an object without its serving a preexisting desire.

Evolution and the Aesthetic Response

Artistic and decorative production predates *Homo sapiens* and is universal across all human cultures and societies. This suggests that, regardless of how exactly it is understood, aesthetic pleasure is rooted in human nature—to a naturalist, this means biology—and that it must therefore be an evolved capacity. Carroll [1995](#) is a manifesto calling for literary criticism to be grounded in evolutionary theory. The main problem for an evolutionary account is that the pursuit of art uses up material resources that, on the face of it, would be better devoted to other pursuits and to the avoidance of danger. How then does “the art instinct” contribute to adaptation? Pinker [2002](#) argues that art can only be a “spandrel,” an evolutionary byproduct that has no direct advantage. More positive answers yield more informative views of what we find beautiful and why. Davies [2012](#) is a comprehensive discussion centered on the idea that humans are attracted to things that promote fitness. Tooby and Cosmides [2001](#) and Matthen [2015](#) give natural selection answers having to do with skill and learning. Dutton [2009](#) suggests that “sexual selection” explains aesthetic production; males who squander resources are thought by females to possess an excess of fitness and hence to be desirable mates. Suits [1985](#) is not directly about evolution, but suggests a way that certain forms of art can emerge as forms of play.

Carroll, Joseph. “Evolution and Literary Theory.” *Human Nature* 6 (1995): 119–134.

All human capacities, including the creative aesthetic impulse, ultimately evolved because they maximize inclusive fitness. Literary works reflect the interests of human beings as living beings, and consequently they must be assumed to be representations of objective reality. An evolutionary view contradicts the dominant post-structuralism of recent literary theory.

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

An eclectic survey of the field of evolutionary aesthetics, which posits aesthetic universals locally modified by culture. Biological fitness is enhanced by the search for the beautiful and the sublime. But fuller understanding of aesthetic norms requires an understanding of how they are embedded in cross-culturally variant and emergent norms. Takes issue with the Kantian ideas that aesthetic pleasure is disinterested and that it is a response to contemplating an object, as opposed to the object itself.

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

A highly original and provocative evolutionary treatment of art. Starts from the premise that art cannot be adaptive, but that it cannot be an accidental evolutionary development either—a spandrel. Develops the idea that it is, instead, the product of “sexual selection,” a display of excess capacity that encourages sexual attraction, and attempts to show how disparate forms of art, united only by a “cluster concept,” serve this purpose.

Matthen, Mohan. “Play, Skill, and the Origins of Perceptual Art.” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55 (2015): 173–197.

Places art production and appreciation in a context of developed skill, some not having to do with art itself. Distinguishes the “primary attractors” of art learned through spontaneous play in infancy, which helps develop perceptual skill, and “secondary attractors”—form, performance, nuance—which are essential to art but are effortfully learned both in production and in consumption.

Pinker, Steven. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. New York: Penguin Viking, 2002.

Art evolved, but not by adaptation. It is a spandrel, a byproduct of three other adaptations: the hunger for status, the advantage of being attracted to adaptive objects and environments by their perceived beauty, and the ability to design artifacts to achieve desired ends.

Suits, Bernard. “The Detective Story: A Case Study of Games in Literature.” *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 85 (1985): 200–219.

Games have two kinds of goal: the “prelusory” goal is specified independently of any game—for example, putting a ball in a net—and the “lusory” goal is doing so within agreed rules. Some art forms can be understood as games; others as using rules with expressive intent. Though not an evolutionary account per se, it provides a plausible framework in which to apply game theory to the evolution of art.

Tooby, John, and Leda Cosmides. “Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds? Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Aesthetics, Fiction and the Arts.” *SubStance* 30 (2001): 6–27.

Seeks to explain why paying close attention to something—the essence of art appreciation—is adaptive: “A human being should find something beautiful because it exhibits cues which, in the environment in which humans evolved, signaled that it would have been advantageous to pay sustained sensory attention to it, in the absence of instrumental reasons for doing so” (p. 17).

Psychology and the Aesthetic Response

Are there cross-cultural aesthetic universals—i.e., specific preferences—produced by information-processing structures of the brain? Zeki [1999](#) and Ramachandran and Hirstein [1999](#) are pioneering accounts of the psychological basis of experience of art; each invokes visual constancies of form perception to explain certain movements in visual art. Palmer, et al. [2013](#) reviews some visual universals, especially those involving color preference. The neuroaesthetics program investigates aspects of brain function that might account for the aesthetic experience as such, independently of the objects that evoke such experience. Bullot and Reber [2013](#) revives the idea that aesthetic pleasure derives from fluency of processing. Chatterjee [2011](#) is a broad-ranging review of the neural substrates of aesthetic response; Pearce, et al. [2016](#) attempts to bring a philosophically sophisticated conceptual framework to bear on empirical research. Cela-Conde, et al. [2013](#) proposes a dual-processing view of aesthetic judgment.

Bullot, Nicolas J., and Rolf Reber. “The Artful Mind Meets Art History: Toward a Psycho-historical Framework for the Science of Art Appreciation.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 36.2 (2013): 123–180.

Adapts a fluency theory of aesthetic pleasure to accommodate the influence of historical development of art. Argues for a psychohistorical approach in which audiences use knowledge of art history and production techniques to develop their sensitivity to art beyond that which basic exposure affords.

Cela-Conde, Camilo J., Juan García-Prieto, José J. Ramasco, et al. “Dynamics of Brain Networks in the Aesthetic Appreciation.” In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the*

United States of America 110 (In the Light of Evolution VII: The Human Mental Machinery) (2013): 10454–10461.

Argues, on the basis of neuroimaging, that three different brain functions are involved in visual aesthetic response: perception, an earlier pleasure response, and a later appraisal of “detailed aspects of beauty.” Parallels are noted with other processes in which emotional response precedes reasoned judgment—though the timescales studied here (<1.5 s) are probably too short to ground a distinction in these terms.

Chatterjee, Anjan. “Neuroaesthetics: A Coming of Age Story.” *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 23.1 (2011): 53–62.

A review of recent “neuroaesthetic” theories that ground aesthetic response in neural organization. Evidence for this is found, first, in changes in appreciation and productivity in patients with brain damage or other pathologies. Second, various aesthetically pleasing features of visual art, such as “unity in diversity,” are attributed to various stages of visual processing. Finally, brain centers of aesthetic pleasure are localized by fMRI studies correlated by subjective report.

Palmer, Stephen E., Karen B. Schloss, and Jonathan Sammartino. “Visual Aesthetics and Human Preference.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 64.1 (2013): 77–107.

A methodologically sophisticated study of simple preferences among simple directly sensed visual properties such as color, color contrast, and spatial patterns. Skirts response to art on the grounds that it is interpersonally variable, while preference for simple properties is “systematic” within cultural groups. Surveys different theories of these preferences, such as those that appeal to mere exposure, arousal, familiar prototypes, and fluency of processing.

Pearce, Markus T., D. W. Zaidel, O. Vartanian, et al. “Neuroaesthetics: The Cognitive Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 11 (2016): 265–279.

An attempt to construct a conceptual framework for work on neural substrates for aesthetic experience of a wide range of objects, including natural scenes, art, and mathematics, at many levels, including the perceptual, the semantic, and the reflective. In the brain, a sophisticated response to art is realized not in a “beauty center” but in network activity involving perceptual, cognitive, and affective areas.

Ramachandran, Vilayanur S., and William Hirstein. “The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience.” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6.6–7 (1999): 15–41.

Proposes a set of universal visual pleasure responses based on processes that extract information from retinal information. The processes that tend toward significant patterns are amplified by reward from limbic structures. For example, the peak shift effect elicits behavioral response when a significant pattern is exaggerated. Eight “laws of artistic experience” are derived from such effects.

Zeki, Samir. “Art and the Brain.” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6.6–7 (1999): 76–96.

Both vision and visual art rely on processes that distill external constancies from the changing flux of light that falls on the eye. The brain instinctively forms “a Concept or an Ideal” of external objects; this Concept is radically at odds with superficial experience. Art pleases

because it captures the unchanging Ideal. Cubism, in particular, presents the essence that lies behind changing experience of shape; others capture motion and line.

Hedonist Tendencies

Aesthetic pleasure is a form of “liking” an object, an engagement with the object that motivates further engagement. In its purest form, AH would define aesthetic merit as determined by such pleasure. A scientific strain of AH emerged in the United States at around the turn of the 20th century; in this iteration, pleasure and its analogues are more securely tied to conceptions in empirical psychology. Marshall [1894](#) and Santayana [1896](#) were influential early accounts. Their attention to psychological science defines one major methodological tendency among AH proponents. The main problem faced by any form of AH is that the majority of people fail to like “high” art and “ahedonic” art such as tragedy (see [Ahedonic Art](#)), whereas most philosophers assume that this is where merit lies. So, AH must be qualified or hedged in. There are several options. (1) A weaker form of AH defines focal aesthetic properties, such as beauty, in terms of pleasure, but allows that other factors are relevant to merit. Mothersill [1984](#) is an influential treatment of beauty that grounds it in a stable disposition to give pleasure, while allowing that other factors, such as reflection, are involved in judgment. Lamarque and Olsen [2004](#) decries a tendency in literary criticism to over-intellectualize aesthetic response, the recommended remedy being an appeal to “restore pleasure.” (2) A more inclusive conception of “liking” and pleasure admits a greater variety of responses to art, including the emotions. Historical Indian and Chinese philosophies favor this approach. Pollock [2016](#) surveys Indian “*rasa*” theory, in which emotional immersion is the primary value. Shusterman [2009](#) shows how Confucius treats personal enjoyment in a social context. Beardsley [1981](#) takes aesthetic experience to be valuable for many reasons, among them its ability to relieve tension and clarify our mental lives. Bahm [1972](#) broadens the scope of the pleasure concept to include other motivational states; Freeman [2012](#) proposes that the value of art consists in its unique capacity to engage a range of emotions. Finally, (3) a restriction may be placed on subjects—merit is taken to be determined by the pleasurable response of only those who have learned to discriminate—this device (see [Hutcheson and Hume](#)) has generally fallen out of favor in the early 21st century. Going in a somewhat different direction, Matthen [2018](#) is the work of a pure hedonist, grounding the value of all art, including high art, in a special kind of pleasure that reinforces culturally learned forms of engagement.

Bahm, Archie J. “Is a Universal Science of Aesthetics Possible?” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (1972): 3–7.

Holds that intrinsic value lies in positive experience of different kinds—pleasure, satisfaction, desirousness, and contentment. Experiences of beauty involve “an intuition of intrinsic value” projected onto an object. Art is a man-made object intended to produce an experience of beauty. Since everybody can experience beauty, there is a universal science of aesthetics.

Beardsley, Monroe. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. 2d ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981.

A landmark of 20th-century aesthetics. Analyzes aesthetic value in terms of an artwork’s ability to produce an aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience is an experience that is brought about by a work of art, and is unified and pleasurable because of the form of the work. This experience is valuable for many reasons, including relieving tension and clarifying our mental lives.

Freeman, Damien. *Art's Emotions: Ethics, Expression and Aesthetic Experience*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012.

The value of art lies in the life-enriching “plenary” emotional experience it offers. This arises out of the interactions among its various essential aspects—content in its formal and technical context—which evoke a whole range of interrelated emotions. These are projected onto artworks, which we experience as imbued with the complex unity of our emotional response.

Lamarque, Peter, and Stein Haugom Olsen. “The Philosophy of Literature: Pleasure Restored.” In *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*. Edited by Peter Kivy, 195–214. Malden, MA: Blackwell-Wiley, 2004.

The philosophy of literature should reorient itself toward evaluating art in terms of its capacity to please, understood broadly to include appeal to affective or non-cognitive capacity, thereby correcting the Platonic emphasis on “disinterested” evaluation in terms of epistemic or moral worth. Hermeneutic and semantic approaches to literature are overly preoccupied with *meaning*, and do not sufficiently differentiate it from “legal documents.”

Marshall, Henry Rutgers. *Pain, Pleasure, and Aesthetics: An Essay Concerning the Psychology of Pain and Pleasure, with Special Reference to Aesthetics*. London: MacMillan, 1894.

Holds that pleasure and pain are opposite poles of a single continuum. Aesthetic experiences “depend directly on pleasure laws, and indirectly therefore on the laws of pain.” Aesthetic pleasure is different from other kinds because accompanies the recollection of a beautiful thing, though immediate repetition saps the immediate energy available for pleasure. Subject to the latter limitation, artworks are valuable insofar as they give consumers pleasure over multiple encounters. They create a lasting “pleasure field.”

Matthen, Mohan. “New Prospects for Aesthetic Hedonism.” In *Social Aesthetics and Moral Judgment: Pleasure, Reflection and Accountability*. Edited by Jennifer A. McMahon, 13–33. London: Routledge, 2018.

Aesthetic objectivism fails (a) because it cannot accommodate cultural variation and (b) because objectively existing natural properties cannot ground affective response of the kind that art evokes. Art seeks to elicit an attitude of self-reinforcing mental engagement, which defines aesthetic pleasure. Audiences learn in a culturally determined manner to respond with this kind of pleasure. This interplay between artists and audiences defines the instrumental value of art.

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

Individuals make “genuine” judgments about beauty. Though no natural property is sufficient for beauty, it does not reduce to a non-aesthetic property. Beautiful things give pleasure independently of any mere situational effect. This pleasure survives reflection, and has some implications regarding the pleasure-reactions of other subjects. “Any individual is beautiful if and only if it is such as to be a cause of pleasure in virtue of its aesthetic properties” (p. 347).

Pollock, Sheldon. “An Intellectual History of Rasa.” In *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*. Edited by Sheldon Pollock, 1–46. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

In Indian philosophy, philosophical aesthetics is mostly about literature and sometimes about music. The 9th-century sage Bharata held that the aim here is *rasa* (literally “juice” or, in this

application, “taste” or “flavor”), the communication of an emotional complex, as in Valmiki’s expression of grief at a hunter killing a bird. Later *rasa* theory is often a commentary on Bharata that enumerates and tabulates the basic emotions expressed by fine literature.

Santayana, George. *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory*. New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1896.

An expressivist take on beauty, in which it is a projection onto objects of pleasure taken in certain activities directed at them. Thus, beauty is “pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing” (p. 49) and all specifically aesthetic features of experiences are “direct transmutations of pleasures and pains” (p. 84). Describes why various visual forms can be pleasurable (Part 3).

Shusterman, Richard. “Pragmatist Aesthetics and Confucianism.” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 43.1 (2009): 18–29.

In Confucius, art is “not only a source of inner pleasure” but also “a practical way of giving grace and beauty to the social functions of everyday life” (p. 20). Artistic value is not intrinsic to objects: quoting Confucius, “In referring time and again to making music, how could I be talking about bells and drums?” The role of philosophical aesthetics is not to define beauty, but rather to enhance experience and the social order that results from it.

Antihedonist Views

Opponents of hedonism focus on five main themes. The works listed in this section each develop one or more of these themes. First, concentrating on the quality of experience produced by art doesn’t do justice to the variety of qualities that people appreciate in art, and thus it erases the fine texture of critical discourse. Graham [1994](#) is a fine proponent of this line of thought. Lopes [2017](#) and Lopes [2018](#) offer a more societally embedded incarnation of the idea, arguing that experts make aesthetic judgments that are not based on experience. Second, it makes art instrumental, and thus dispensable if the experience could be created without the art. Shelley [2010](#) is an influential proponent of this argument. Third, art can be non-pleasurable; tragedy evokes many unpleasant feelings, yet it is highly valued. Coleman [1971](#) is by an early scout; Levinson [1992](#) is by a brilliant later developer. Fourth, there are values in art other than the quality of the experience that is produced; society would not expend resources on art if it was merely designed to evoke pleasure. Graham [1994](#) and Levinson [1992](#) argue this way. Finally, pleasure results from the apprehension of other good qualities and is not, therefore, the ground of value; Plato espouses a rationalist version of this idea as recounted in Barney [2010](#); Arnheim [1993](#) gives an Aristotelian take on this idea; Gorodeisky [2018](#), cited under [Nature of Aesthetic Pleasure](#), takes pleasure to be an apprehension of objective value.

Arnheim, Rudolf. “From Pleasure to Contemplation.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51.2 (1993): 195–197.

Invokes Aristotle’s conception of the contemplative life. It is pleasurable, but this is not what gives it value. Rather, it is valuable *and* it gives pleasure because it actualizes the divine component of the human essence. Similarly, artworks are not primarily valuable for the pleasures they offer; rather, they are valuable *and* they give pleasure because they enable us to “experience the powers that carry the meaning of our existence” (p. 197).

Barney, Rachel. "Notes on Plato on the *Kalon* and the Good." *Classical Philology* 105 (2010): 363–380.

A careful investigation of Plato's use of the term "*kalon*," which is very roughly equivalent to "beautiful," and its relationship to the notion of the Good. Teases out the rationalism and antihedonism of Plato's attitude, particularly in the *Symposium*, the *Hippias Major*, and the *Republic*. The references to the literature on this topic are comprehensive and very useful.

Coleman, Francis J. "Is Aesthetic Pleasure a Myth?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29 (1971): 319–332.

Early version of the argument that art does not necessarily give pleasure; it is "fatuous" to hold that people get enjoyment or pleasure from deep works of tragedy, or that persons engage with art in order to get pleasure.

Graham, Gordon. "Art, Pleasure, and Play." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 28.2 (1994): 217–232.

To say we enjoy art says nothing specific about why a particular work gives enjoyment, or about the wider civic function of art. Nor does mere enjoyment explain why we pursue serious, as opposed to amusing, forms of art. Neither Mill's distinction between higher and lower pleasures nor Kant's notion of disinterestedness helps. Gadamer's notion of play helps, but we should note that play can be serious, not merely diverting.

Levinson, Jerrold. "Pleasure and the Value of the Works of Art." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32.4 (1992): 295–306.

A canonical critique of the idea that "the value of a work of art is closely related to pleasure." Though this idea has some truth to it, the pleasure in question must be of the right kind and arises with an appropriate appreciation of the "creative context." Moreover, art delivers characteristic goods in the absence of anything one could comfortably call pleasure. And we devote more time to art than mere pleasure would justify.

Lopes, Dominic McIver. "Beauty, the Social Network." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 47.4 (2017): 437–453.

There is a network of experts involved in the creation of any artwork. These networks are specific to "artistic kinds": curating or editing for one such kind will be a different expertise than for another. AH is focused on explaining appreciation, but (whatever its successes in this direction) it is incapable of explaining the whole range of activities that these networks engage in.

Lopes, Dominic McIver. "Six Degrees of Separation." In *Being for Beauty*. By Dominic McIver Lopes, 71–88. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Identifies six features of the activities of aesthetic experts that cause trouble for AH. Art is attended by experts of many kinds—editors, curators, publishers, critics. These experts demonstrate the stability of reasons for aesthetic judgments. Their reasons are based on aims internal to aesthetic practice, not on expected quality of experience. Insofar as these reasons are aesthetic, they run counter to AH.

Shelley, James. "Against Value Empiricism in Aesthetics." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88.4 (2010): 707–720.

Value empiricism holds that an object has aesthetic value because it produces a valuable experience. Since such value is instrumental, any other way of producing the experience would inherit the same value, thus rendering the object dispensable. This is an unacceptable conclusion. On the other hand, attempts to involve qualities of the object are inevitably circular because they are grounded in the qualities themselves, independent of the experience.

Ahedonic Art

Some works of art—tragedies, melodramas, horror films—evoke unpleasant feelings or emotions. Call these ahedonic artworks. Why do we consume these works, and consider some of them to be valuable or aesthetically excellent? Some consider ahedonic works to be a problem for aesthetic hedonists: if these works give us negative feelings or emotions, why do we also find them valuable? This question has come up in a number of historical and contemporary contexts; see the essays in Levinson [2014](#). Aesthetic hedonists can respond to apparent problems from ahedonic works in several ways. First, a distinction between pleasure as a functional state and pleasure as a sensation will put pressure on the challenge from ahedonic works. While ahedonic works might give negative sensations, this does not prevent ahedonic works from providing pleasure if pleasure is a functional motivating state. Second, the hedonist can claim that while negative feelings or emotions are involved in our experience of ahedonic works, those experiences are still, on the whole, pleasurable. There have been several proposals for how this might happen; see Smutts [2009](#) and Strohl [2018](#) for overviews. The negative experience might be *transformed* into an overall pleasurable experience. Hume may have held this view (see [Hutcheson and Hume](#)); see also Kieran [1997](#) and Strohl [2012](#). Or other pleasurable elements of ahedonic works might outweigh the negative elements in our experience of ahedonic works (Feagin [1983](#), Carroll [1990](#), Evers and Deng [2016](#)).

Carroll, Noël. *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

An influential account of the nature of the horror genre, including an account (in chapter 4) of why we enjoy horror films, even though they are repulsive or frightening. Carroll proposes that horror involves “monsters,” or beings that violate our classificatory schemes. Monsters are frightening and repulsive, but also invoke a pleasurable curiosity, precisely because they violate our classificatory schemes.

Evers, Daan, and Natalja Deng. “Acknowledgement and the Paradox of Tragedy.” *Philosophical Studies* 173.2 (2016): 337–350.

Proposes that tragic works provide pleasure because they provide an opportunity to acknowledge sad features of life, and their significance. They speculate that this acknowledgment can be pleasurable because the consumer of tragedy and the tragic work itself share a stance on the sadness and significance of events.

Feagin, Susan L. “The Pleasures of Tragedy.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20.1 (1983): 95–104.

Argues that the pleasure we take in tragic works is not a first-order response, but rather a “meta-response.” When we feel sorrow or anguish in response to tragedy, we take pleasure in the fact that we have reacted to tragic events in this way; we are comforted by the fact that we are the kind of people who feel sorrow when confronted with tragic events.

Kieran, Matthew. "Aesthetic Value: Beauty, Ugliness, and Incoherence." *Philosophy* 72.281 (1997): 383–399.

Defends accounts of aesthetic value that analyze it in terms of pleasure against the purported counterexamples of ugly or incoherent artworks. We can take delight and take pleasure in ugly or incoherent elements of works, even though we might not consider ugliness or incoherence as such to be valuable.

Levinson, Jerrold, ed. *Suffering Art Gladly: The Paradox of Negative Emotions in Art*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

A wide-ranging collection of papers, including essays on historical figures (Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Schopenhauer) and 18th-century aesthetics, as well as contemporary approaches.

Smutts, Aaron. "Art and Negative Affect." *Philosophy Compass* 4.1 (2009): 39–55.

Provides a useful introduction to the problem of ahedonic art, and surveys many extant responses.

Strohl, Matthew. "Horror and Hedonic Ambivalence." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70.2 (2012): 203–212.

A sophisticated proposal for our experience of horror can be pleasurable. Argues that simple accounts of pain and pleasurable are inadequate for understanding our experience of horror. Introduces an adverbialist account of pleasure, inspired by Aristotle's remarks on pleasure in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In horror films, painful elements can contribute to the overall pleasure one experiences in a work.

Strohl, Matthew. "Art and Painful Emotion." *Philosophy Compass* (2018).

An update on Smutts [2009](#). Offers a taxonomy of responses to the paradox of tragedy and the paradox of horror, and argues for pluralism and against accepting a single solution.

Aristotle

Aristotle had a distinctive conception of pleasure, developed largely in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Roughly, Aristotle takes pleasure to occur when there is a "fit" between an animal's capacities, its activity, and the objects of its activity. One capacity of humans is to achieve understanding and recognition. Humans feel pleasure when they achieve understanding and recognition through engaging with mimetic arts: see Halliwell [1986](#) and Halliwell [2002](#) for detailed accounts. As one engages with different mimetic arts differently, each mimetic art will have a distinctive kind of pleasure. An enormous amount of scholarship has been devoted to interpreting Aristotle's view on the distinctive kind of pleasure afforded by tragedy; see Curran [2016](#) and Woodruff [2009](#) for introductions. Spectators of tragedy experience catharsis: a positive feeling brought on by an experience of pity and fear (for related issues, see [Ahedonic Art](#)). How to understand catharsis is rather contested; Belfiore [1985](#) argues that we should pay less attention to catharsis in coming to understand the pleasure of tragedy. Ferrari [1999](#) gives an account of catharsis on which we feel pleasure from a release from tension generated by the plot, and Rorty [1991](#) emphasizes the many different types of pleasures we feel in engaging with tragedies.

Belfiore, Elizabeth. "Pleasure, Tragedy, and Aristotelian Psychology." *The Classical Quarterly* 35.2 (1985): 349–361.

Argues that we should pay less attention to *katharsis*, and instead look to Aristotle's psychological works for an account of the specific pleasure of tragedy. Gives an account of tragedy on which the experience of pity and fear is indeed painful, but that this painful experience is essential to the pleasure we also experience. Pity and fear allow for recognition that the plot is an imitation of some events, and this recognition is pleasurable.

Curran, Angela. "The Distinctive Pleasure of Tragedy." In *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle and the Poetics*. By Angela Curran, 269–295. London: Routledge, 2016.

A good introduction to Aristotle's views on pleasure and different explanations of tragedy's distinctive pleasure, aimed at students and newcomers to Aristotle. Considers four explanations of tragic pleasure: pleasure in virtuous responses to sad events, pleasure in pity and fear facilitated by fictional distance from the events depicted, a cognitive pleasure taken in what we learn from tragedy, and pleasure in emotional understanding. Curran favors the fourth option.

Ferrari, F. R. F. "Aristotle's Literary Aesthetics." *Phronesis* 44.3 (1999): 181–198.

Argues that the *Poetics* should be read as an explanation of literary works as such, rather than as an argument for the moral value of tragedy. On this reading, the proper pleasure of tragedy is the release of suspense built up by the plot.

Halliwel, Steven. "Aristotle's Aesthetics 1: Art and Its Pleasure." In *Aristotle's Poetics*. Edited by Steven Halliwel, W. Hamilton Fyfe, D. A. Russell, and Doreen Innes, 42–81. London: Duckworth Press, 1986.

In the first half of the chapter, considers whether Aristotle had a conception of the arts as a unified category, and answers in the affirmative. In the second half, enumerates three types of aesthetic pleasure: theatrical spectacle, sensual pleasure, and cognitive pleasure, focusing on an account of the latter.

Halliwel, Steven. "The Rewards of Mimesis: Pleasure, Understanding, and Emotion in Aristotle's Aesthetics." In *The Aesthetics of Mimesis; Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*. By Steven Halliwel, 177–206. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.

A sophisticated and detailed account of Aristotle's views on aesthetic pleasure, on which aesthetic pleasure is "both objectivist and cognitivist" (p. 186). Emphasizes the importance of attending to the complex and interrelated roles of pleasure, understanding and recognition, and emotions for a complete account of aesthetic experience.

Rorty, Amelie Oksenberg. "The Psychology of Aristotelian Tragedy." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 16 (1991): 53–72.

A classic article that presents a thorough view of Aristotle's account of tragedy. A short section devoted to pleasure (pp. 66–67) emphasizes that our pleasure in tragedy comes from many different sources: "[w]hen it is well structured and well performed, tragedy conjoins sensory, therapeutic, and intellectual pleasures" (p. 67). Reprinted in her *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics* (Amelie Oksenberg, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 1–22.

Woodruff, Paul. "Aristotle's *Poetics*: The Aim of Tragedy." In *A Companion to Aristotle*. Edited by Georgios Anagnostopoulos, 622–637. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2009.

Helpful handbook entry. Structured around the question: at what good does tragedy aim? Outlines a number of issues and constraints on interpretations of central notions in the *Poetics*, especially the aim of tragedy and catharsis. After a compact history of the ways that *katharsis* has been interpreted, Woodruff suggests that the text of the *Poetics* does not determine "an answer to the riddle of *katharsis*" (p. 623).

Hutcheson and Hume

Hutcheson and Hume are the most discussed advocates of sentimentalism in aesthetics; the view that our experience of beauty is a pleasurable sentiment, which is outside the realm of rationality. Shelley [2018](#) discusses both figures as holding that we have an internal sense for beauty, and places them in historical context. Hutcheson's *Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design* argues for and describes this purported internal sense for beauty; see Kivy [2003](#) for a thorough discussion. Hume produced two short works on aesthetics that continue to be widely discussed, and pleasure is central in each. Hume also discusses issues related to aesthetics in other works; see Gracyk [2016](#) for an overview. Hume was straightforwardly an aesthetic hedonist: he takes the capacity to give pleasure as the standard for artistic excellence. In his essays "Of the Standard of Taste" and "Of Tragedy," he confronts two classic problems for aesthetic hedonists: the problem of relativism for aesthetic judgments, and the aesthetic value of seemingly unpleasant aesthetic experiences, respectively. (On the latter, see [Ahedonic Art](#).) First, if pleasure is the ground of aesthetic excellence, and pleasure is a (subjective) feeling or (as Hume says) sentiment, how can the judgment of art tell us anything about the quality of artworks, rather than something idiosyncratic about the judge? In "Of the Standard of Taste," Hume resists aesthetic relativism by appealing to ideal or "true" critics: artworks can be judged by how much pleasure they give to experienced, or perhaps even ideal, critics; see Shelley [2013](#) for an overview. Much of the literature on this essay concerns the *normativity* of the judgments of true critics. Why is it that the judgments of expert critics should have authority over non-expert judgments, when the judgments of experts are still just expressions of the amount of pleasure the expert judge experiences? Kivy [1967](#) finds Hume unsuccessful in explaining this normativity, while Shelley [1998](#) and Levinson [2002](#) defend Hume. Second, why can tragic art be pleasurable? It seems that tragic artworks are pleasurable in part *because* they arouse unpleasant emotions in us. How, then, do we come to feel pleasure in tragic works? Hume is often thought to have had a *conversion* theory, on which the sadness we feel in encountering representations of tragic events are converted into pleasure by the representational features of tragic arts, e.g., the eloquence of the language in a Shakespearean tragedy. Neill [1998](#) finds this conversion theory untenable; Galgut [2001](#) defends Hume. Yanal [1991](#) argues that Hume did not hold a conversion theory, but rather thought that our pleasure in representational elements of tragedy outweigh negative feelings. See Dadlez [2013](#) for an overview of Hume's view of tragedy in its historical context.

Dadlez, E. M. "The Pleasures of Tragedy." In *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*. Edited by James A. Harris, 450–466. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

A useful handbook entry discussing how 18th-century authors approached and attempted to resolve issues raised by tragedy. While focusing on Hume, this handbook entry helpfully situates

Hume and the problems of tragedy in the historical and intellectual context of 18th-century Britain, briefly discussing Lord Kames, George Campbell, Adam Smith, Francis Hutcheson, Joseph Addison, Alexander Gerard, Edmund Burke, and Richard Payne Knight.

Galgut, Elisa. "The Poetry and the Pity: Hume's Account of Tragic Pleasure." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 41 (2001): 411–424.

Defends the viability of Hume's account of tragedy. Argues that our experience of some tragedies does combine pain and pleasure into a single emotional response. Emphasizes the importance of fictionality or distance from the depicted events in our experience of tragic works.

Gracyk, Theodore. "[Hume's Aesthetics](#)." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2016.

An excellent overview of Hume's aesthetics, covering both Hume's essays devoted to aesthetics and aesthetics as it appears in his works on moral philosophy. Emphasizes the connection between Hume's moral philosophy and his aesthetics.

Kivy, Peter. "Hume's Standard of Taste: Breaking the Circle." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 7 (1967): 57–66.

Hume's solution to the normativity of taste is often thought to be circular, roughly: true critics identify good art, and good art is that which true critics identify. Kivy's influential paper argues that we can define some qualities of true critics without circularity, because these qualities exist outside the realm of criticism. However, this leads to a regress: how do we evaluate the sentimental qualities of critics outside of the aesthetic realm?

Kivy, Peter. *The Seventh Sense: Francis Hutcheson and Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics*. 2d ed. Revised and enlarged. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

The only book-length study of Francis Hutcheson. Provides an in-depth study of Hutcheson's *Inquiry*, placing it in the context of Hutcheson's immediate predecessors and tracing its influence.

Levinson, Jerrold. "Hume's Standard of Taste: The Real Problem." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60.3 (2002): 227–238.

Provides an influential framing of the problem of the normativity of aesthetic judgments. Offers a solution by emphasizing "the test of time," which helps us to identify masterpieces. Masterpieces are works of that unquestionably afford valuable aesthetic experiences. Ideal critics are consumers of art who appreciate masterpieces, and who can judge other works by comparing their aesthetic rewards to those provided by masterpieces.

Neill, Alex. "Hume's 'Singular Phænomenon.'" *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39 (1998): 112–125.

Argues that Hume's aim in "Of Tragedy" is not to explain tragedy, but rather to explain the mixture of positive and negative sentiments we encounter in a variety of settings. Argues further that Hume's understanding of pleasure is too coarse-grained to account for our experience of tragedy.

Shelley, James R. "Hume and the Nature of Taste." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56.1 (1998): 29–38.

According to Shelley, Hume holds a two-step account of aesthetic experience: first, we perceive properties; second, we experience pleasure or displeasure, depending on which properties we perceive. The judgments of experts have normative force because of the perceptual stage: true judges simply perceive more properties than non-experts, and this gives their judgments normative authority over those who cannot perceive some properties of the work.

Shelley, James. "Empiricism: Hutcheson and Hume." In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*. Edited by Berys Nigel Gaut and Dominic Lopes, 37–49. New York: Routledge, 2013. A useful and straightforward overview of Francis Hutcheson's *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design* and Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste." The analysis of Hume here follows Shelley [1998](#).

Shelley, James. "[18th Century British Aesthetics](#)." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2018.

Comprehensive overview of many major figures in 18th-century British aesthetics, including sections on Hutcheson and Hume, as well as many lesser-known figures.

Yanal, Robert J. "Hume and Others on the Paradox of Tragedy." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49.1 (1991): 75–76.

Argues that problem Hume attempts to solve in "On Tragedy" has been misunderstood. While some have taken Hume's view to be that the negative feelings we experience in tragic artworks are converted into pleasure, Yanal argues that Hume's view is negative feelings are outweighed by the pleasure of eloquence and beauty in the representation of tragic events.

Kant

Kant's account of aesthetic pleasure is extremely influential. Kant draws a distinction between interested and disinterested pleasure. Disinterested pleasure is distinctive because it does not involve desire: we do not desire the object of our experience of disinterested pleasure. We take interested pleasure in what Kant calls the agreeable: e.g., food or drink; see Zangwill [1995](#). When we experience beauty, we feel disinterested pleasure. Kant's account of how we come to feel disinterested pleasure involves the "free play" of the imagination and the understanding. There are a number of interpretative debates surrounding Kant's view of aesthetic pleasure. First, what is the connection between our feeling of disinterested pleasure and our aesthetic judgments, i.e., our judgments that a work of art or natural scene is beautiful? Some, like Ginsborg [2003](#), hold that to feel the pleasure of the free play of the imagination and the understanding *just is* to judge an object to be beautiful. Others, such as Guyer [1979](#) and Allison [2001](#), hold that there is a gap between feeling this pleasure and judging an object to be beautiful. Second, is disinterested pleasure intentional? Works like Zuckert [2002](#), Allison [2001](#), and Ginsborg [2003](#) interpret Kant as holding that aesthetic pleasure is an intentional state: aesthetic pleasure is caused by the free play of the imagination and the understanding, and is *about* that free play. Guyer [1979](#) argues that on Kant's view aesthetic pleasure is not intentional, but a (mere) sensation.

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

An influential and thorough account of Kant's aesthetics. Against Guyer [1979](#), Allison interprets Kantian aesthetic pleasure to be an intentional state: our aesthetic pleasure makes us aware of the free play of the imagination and the understanding. However, Allison holds that aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic judgment are separate; our feelings of aesthetic pleasure precede our aesthetic judgments. See chapter 2.

Ginsborg, Hannah. "Aesthetic Judging and the Intentionality of Pleasure." *Inquiry* 46.2 (2003): 164–181.

Though officially an extended commentary on Allison [2001](#), provides an excellent overview of some debates around Kant's theory of aesthetic pleasure. While Allison and Ginsborg agree that aesthetic pleasure is intentional for Kant, they disagree over the relationship between aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic judgment: Ginsborg's view is that there is no distinction between aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic judgment for Kant; Allison holds that there is a distinction here for Kant.

Ginsborg, Hannah. "[Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology](#)." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2014.

An excellent and wide-ranging encyclopedia entry, covering topics central to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Section 2.3 covers issues related to Kant's views on aesthetic pleasure.

Guyer, Paul. *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.

A classic and controversial commentary. Guyer takes Kant to hold the view that aesthetic pleasure is a sensation. While this pleasure is caused by the free play or harmony of the imagination and the understanding, the sensation does not make us aware of this harmony. This means that the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful and aesthetic judgments are separate acts, on Guyer's reading of Kant. See chapter 3.

Zangwill, Nick. "Kant on Pleasure in the Agreeable." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53.2 (1995): 167–176.

Clearly sets out issues at stake in interpreting Kant on pleasure in the agreeable (as opposed to the beautiful), but does not engage with other scholarship. On Zangwill's reading of Kant, pleasure in the agreeable generates desire through a judgment. When we judge something to be agreeable, that judgment provokes desire for similar items.

Zuckert, Rachel. "A New Look at Kant's Theory of Pleasure." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60.3 (2002): 239–252.

Argues (against Guyer [1979](#)) that Kant takes pleasure to be a formal, functional state, rather than a sensation. Specifically, the formal nature of pleasure for Kant is that of sustaining pleasure. This means that pleasure is intentional and future-directed: intentional because the pleasure is about itself, and future-directed because the function of this pleasure is to sustain itself into the future.