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HIGH ART VERSUS LOW ART

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Hamlet versus *South Park*; J. Alfred Prufrock versus Mickey Mouse; Beethoven's Fifth symphony versus Justin Bieber's "Eenie Meanie." Such contrasts instantly evoke a familiar and important cultural divide, typically expressed as the distinction between "high" and "low" art. In spite of its familiarity, however, there are many different intuitions about what the general contrast is. Is it a contrast between *art forms* (e.g. poetry versus video games; symphonies versus Top 40 pop songs) or between genres within art forms (e.g. avant-garde novels versus mystery novels), or is it a distinction between *individual works* in the same art form or genre (*Wozzeck* versus *Turandot*; *Citizen Kane* versus *Conan the Barbarian*; "A Day in the Life" versus "Louie, Louie"; *West Side Story* versus *Hair*)? The complexity of the distinction raises a number of basic questions: Do the terms express one fundamental distinction? Is that distinction theoretically coherent? Does it mark significant aesthetic differences and artistic value? Finally, what is the relation of this distinction to the concept of art?

A paradoxical distinction

"High art" is the clearer half of the contrast. In typical use it certainly refers to paradigms of art: *Hamlet*, Eliot's "The Waste Land," Beethoven's *Eroica*, *Swan Lake*, the paintings of Cézanne – indeed, museum paintings generally, most classical music, most poetry and so forth. Now, if "high art" denominates the central cases of art and if by being central they delineate what it is to be art, it is natural to think of the term that contrasts with high art as denoting objects that are not really art, that are labeled "art" only at best in a nonliteral sense: art by courtesy only.

But then is low art *non*art? As Ted Cohen wonders:

> If the distinction between high art and low art is like the distinction between art and non-art, then why do we need *both* distinctions? Suppose I am already lumbered with an art/non-art device, shouldering it because I cannot seem to get along without it. Why do I also drag along a wedge for separating high art from low art? What extra work does it do?
>
> (Cohen 1993: 152)

Even though he clearly sees the relation between the two distinctions as puzzling, Cohen contends that each distinction seems logically distinct and indeed indispensable. One point seems clear: even though "high" and "low" read as adjectives of contrasting quality, we should not equate the high/low distinction with a third distinction, that between *good* and *bad* art. Although "high art" certainly brings to mind canonical works in various art forms, there is much high art – certain paintings, poems, chamber music – that is uninspired, minor, derivative and so forth. Conversely, it does not seem plausible that *all* "low art" could turn out to merit the status of art but be all bad. Even if rock music is low art, *some* songs – for example, by the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix – are surely successful and important examples of art. Thus we cannot equate high art with good art and low art with bad art.

In spite of being controversial – and frequently rejected as undemocratic or elitist – the distinction remains deeply entrenched and a very influential way of structuring our thinking and acting toward the arts. The very ease with which writers can mention "high art" (and "highbrow," "middlebrow" and "lowbrow" art) and expect to be clearly understood shows how firmly entrenched this distinction is in the conceptual scheme we apply to the arts. The types of media and academic coverage of the arts and entertainment, the syllabi of college classes as well as the reasoning used to justify public support of the arts are all predicated on the assumption that high art has great value and is more worth taking seriously and subsidizing than popular art. Indeed, the very concept of art is often delineated by reference to familiar examples of high art, such as Beethoven's Fifth, *Anna Karenina* or *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Writers find it natural to equate "high art" with "art" per se as it is theorized in the philosophy of art. For example, failing to find an adequate definition of popular art, Gracyk concludes, "We are thrown back onto the problem of defining 'popular' so that it appropriately contrasts the popular with 'serious,' high, or fine art" (2007b: 383). Accordingly, when the notion of artistic value is analyzed or defended it is almost always by appeal to values that are associated with high art and exemplified by examples of high artworks.

The underlying conceptual structure

There are two main ways of analyzing the semantic structure underlying the high–low distinction. One way is to associate high art with so-called "high arts," in short, to equate high art with certain art forms or genres such as classical music, sculpture and poetry. Call this the form and genre view. This suggests that the distinction is an offspring of the "Modern system of the arts" defined by Kristeller (1992). He argued that eighteenth-century thinkers for the first time grouped certain arts together into a separate and coherent group of activities and artifacts with a distinctive character; these were the "fine" arts. In 1746 Charles Batteux influentially proposed the following grouping as defining the fine arts: painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry. Kristeller argued that such groupings were the origin of the modern notion of art with a capital "A."

The origin of the distinction in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe may suggest to some that it is no more relevant to contemporary society than is the taste

in clothes of earlier centuries. Some (Levine 1988; Novitz 1989, 1992) write as if the high/low distinction instead is a twentieth-century bias. However, there has always been a tendency to rank and to divide art forms into higher and lower. Ranking the arts was a common activity of thinkers from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century. Leonardo, for instance, argued that painting was superior to poetry, music and sculpture (Kemp 1989). The ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl points out that distinctions between broad categories of music and consequent value hierarchies are common in societies as diverse as the Blackfoot, Asian societies and traditional Iranian society (Nettl: 2005: 364). The high/low distinction is not a local cultural bias.

Even granting that fact, some social theorists would argue that the existence of such hierarchies reflects social power relations rather than differences of artistic value. This is the view implied by the influential cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who comments on the difference between highbrow and middlebrow taste: "The various kinds of cultural competence encountered in a class society derive their social value from the power of social discrimination … this system is … always hierarchized" (1993: 129; for a critique of Bourdieu's theory, see Crowther 1994). As Gracyk puts it, "Some philosophers contend that fine art is essentially different from popular art, but others hold that the distinction is entirely social in origin" (2007b: 380).

Although the term "high art" is strongly associated with certain art forms, there are significant reasons to seek a deeper explanation of the high/low distinction, one that is based on properties that determine the location of an artwork on the high/low hierarchy. Even Batteux used a common property to ground his set of fine arts: the property of being imitations of beautiful nature. Although there is a close correlation between certain art forms and genres and high art or low art properties, it is problematic to simply identify the high art/low art hierarchy with a set of forms and genres. Consider for example the property of formal complexity, especially of a challenging or unpredictable character. This property is commonly associated with high art, whereas simple predictable forms are associated with popular arts. Although such properties are highly correlated with certain art forms and genres, there are no necessary connections.

Accordingly, there is another way to analyze the distinction, one that explains the conceptual structure underlying our actual deployment of the distinction and does not identify it simply with art forms and genres. This analysis involves a multidimensional cluster of properties. It is multidimensional because there are many properties of works that in various combinations weave together to comprise the concept of high art. For convenience I will call these "threads." I call it a cluster distinction by analogy with Berys Gaut's account of art as a cluster concept. Gaut rejects essentialist accounts that define the concept of art by a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Instead, Gaut proposes that there are many properties that tend to count "toward something's being a work of art, and the absence of which counts against it being a work of art: (1) possessing positive aesthetic properties … (2) being expressive of emotion, (3) being intellectually challenging … (4) being formally complex and coherent … " (2000: 28). Gaut makes no claim that his list of properties is entirely correct. The basic idea is to reject an essentialist definition and to propose that the category of artworks is more loosely identified by a cluster of properties.

The concept of high art similarly appears to be a category that identifies member artworks by their assumed possession or intended possession of some of a cluster of properties. A further feature of the cluster is that these properties (the threads) often come in degrees; they are scalar – for instance, the property of possessing a challenging formal structure. This helps to explain why the high-to-low hierarchy is actually continuous rather than binary. To complete the explanation we must add that a given work may have a mixture of properties in the high art cluster. These two features explain the emergence of the category of "middlebrow": works that have some of the properties of high art but also lack some or have them to a lower degree or possess some of the properties that positively weigh toward the lower end of the scale, such as being made primarily for entertainment. "Middlebrow," accordingly, is a necessary term precisely because the threads of the distinction are a matter of degree, and because there are multiple threads with no single property decisive for one end of the hierarchy or the other.

There is no classical logical structure to this conceptual landscape: some of the properties are logically interrelated and some carry more categorizing weight than others. Nor can it be ignored that this value hierarchy emerged in a historical context, starting in the eighteenth century and becoming solidified in the nineteenth century's Romantic view of art and artists. Hence, some of the historical properties, such as being in a form or genre that originated in aristocratic courts (the first ballets and the first operas were performed in these around 1600) may not by themselves appear today to add artistic value any more than the fact that the galliard was popular in those courts makes it a better dance than the hustle.

The properties of artworks that delineate the concept of high art have to be shareable by many sorts of forms and genres, thus they are second-order properties of properties. They can be roughly divided into the following dimensions. (Note (i) in this model no property is necessary; rather, they tend to count toward a work being high art, and (ii) no one dimension has universal priority over the others, but in context one may dominate, e.g. truth often dominates beauty.)

(H1)   *Content*: (i) Representational – morally serious (Lamarque, "Literature," Chapter 50 of this volume), poetic truth, true to reality (Hospers – see Lamarque, Chapter 50 of this volume, pp. 000; Passmore 1991: ch. 6); (ii) emotional – genuine, authentic emotional experience, not shallow, conventional or sentimental.

(H2)   *Form*: Organically unified into a whole work, internally coherent but not formulaic, formal structures are aesthetically valuable objects of appreciation.

(H3)   *Features of a work's creation*: (i) Created by a single artist (the "author," "auteur") or by a group under the direction of a central figure or figures (choreographer, director, composer and librettist), (ii) who exemplifies creativity and originality so as to create a unique work, (iii) has skill, knowledge of her art form, knowledge of the relevant tradition of high arts, (iv) intends to contribute to that tradition (Scruton 2007 emphasizes continuity of high culture), (v) aims to control the work so as to achieve formal cohesion.

(H4)   *Nature of intended effects* on the audience (the nature of its intended engagement and the primary use of the work): (i) intended to engage the intellect and in

some cases moral dispositions, (ii) and to be appreciated aesthetically (what this amounts to is controversial), and (iii) possessing significant autonomy ("art for art's sake").

One traditional idea of aesthetic appreciation is the Kantian notion of disinterestedness, which Bourdieu (1984) assumes is required to engage high art. However, a stance of Kantian disinterestedness seems contrary to the way most people experience a majority of high artworks. Moreover, many theories of art, for example, expression theory and pragmatic theories, reject such a Kantian basis for art.

Bourdieu denies that the "aesthetic disposition" required to engage with high art is, as Kant argued, a universal faculty. He argues that it is a product of learning and cultural position rather than a natural endowment that magically leads to "a miracle of the unequal class distribution of the capacity for inspired encounters with works of art and high culture generally" (1984: 173). This leads Bourdieu to his view about the hidden social function of high art: "the sacralization of culture and art fulfils a vital function by contributing to the consecration of the social order: to enable educated people to believe in barbarism and persuade the barbarians within the gates of their own barbarity" (1993: 236).

Bourdieu goes on to contrast the "aesthetic disposition" with the "popular aesthetic." This, the aesthetic stance of the less cultured, he characterizes as "based on the affirmation of continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function, or, one might say, on refusing the refusal, which is the starting point of the high aesthetic" (1984: 176). He takes the "aesthetic disposition," by contrast, to require "rejecting what is generic, i.e., *common*, 'easy' and immediately accessible, starting with everything that reduces the aesthetic animal to pure and simple animality, to palpable pleasure or sensual desire" (1984: 175–76).

The dimension of the intended effects and primary uses or functions of a work tends to be one of the main threads that count toward placing popular art toward the lower end of the hierarchy of artistic status. Thus, one property that tends to give works in an art form lower artistic status is this:

(L1)   *Primary Goal is entertainment*: If a popular artwork's main goal is entertainment, to provide diversion and easy pleasure not involving any significant intellectual or perceptual demands, then it is (i) not autonomous and (ii) its paramount focus does not involve the aesthetic and content goals ascribed to high art.

Another important feature tending to lower artistic status involves the prominent bodily effects popular arts often intend to have on their audience.

(L2)   A *Primary Aim is to cause basic bodily responses*: This would be such as dancing, singing along, screaming and laughing, in short, physical engagement.

Popular music is typically designed to move the body to dance, and not merely in decorous ways but in sensuous whole-body ways (Shusterman 1991). The fact that bodily responses tend to count toward lower artistic status explains why we do not rank Strauss waltzes as high art even though they are well-crafted examples of

classical music. Humor and jokes are also largely relegated to lower artistic status because they evoke immediate physical reactions, laughing or smiling, that seem to bypass conscious reasoning. Moreover, humor has been traditionally regarded as irrational because it invites us to appreciate incongruity (Morreall 2009: ch. 1). One reason stand-up comedy routines and sitcom episodes are typically discounted as high art is that humor and jokes are their main point.

The cluster model may seem to have the counterintuitive implication that works in a low art form could be high art and, vice versa, works in a high art form could be lower art. That this seems counterintuitive shows that the form and genre model describes a significant constituent of the high art concept. But the result may also be viewed as a reason to accept the priority of the cluster model. It certainly happens that works of popular art – for example, some popular music genres such as alternative rock – possess properties from the high art cluster. Some episodes of the conceptual sitcom *Community*, with multiple timelines, are as complex as a serious film. On the high art form side, there are, for example, skillful painters, such as Thomas Kinkade and Norman Rockwell, whose kitsch images are not widely regarded as high art. Some art forms strongly enforce either high art or lower art properties, thus they can be labeled high arts or low arts. But many art forms and genres, such as architecture, merely afford the possibility of high art. Movies are a good example of a wide range of possibilities on the high–low scale; even popular genres such as horror, westerns and musicals can produce examples of high art. On the low end of the scale, TV soap operas with their cliché-ridden emotions tend to be constrained to producing low art, as are, for different reasons, comics and video games. (However, on video games as art, see Smuts 2005.) Conversely, string quartets are by their form constrained in the opposite direction to possessing high art formal properties.

The cluster model also explains many other cultural ranking phenomena, such as the conflicting intuitions about where to rank some artwork, for example, tango performances or photojournalism. It explains how an art form or genre, such as ceramics, can go from purely craft status to being considered a fine art: this happens when ceramicists (formerly known as potters) emphasize the sculptural possibilities of the medium. Movies too were first considered low art, growing out of carnival shows and vaudeville programs; yet in a few decades they developed the capacity to afford high art properties. Finally, the cluster model explains our initial puzzling intuitions about the multiple levels at which the hierarchy can be applied. It applies to individual works within a form or genre and it also applies to forms or genres insofar as they tend to enforce or discourage the cluster properties that underlie the hierarchy.

If it is more adequate to analyze the underlying conceptual structure of the high/low distinction in terms of characteristic properties presumed to apply to high artworks, rather than to rely on a list of forms or genres to identify high art, then to reject the value hierarchy implies questioning the value of such properties. Conversely, it is easier to reject the hierarchy if it is viewed as an ungrounded preference for certain art forms over others.

Debate about the distinction and the value hierarchy that it encodes is often logically unclear. We can see why by noting that there is a distinction between denial that there are systematic differences between low and high art and rejection of the claim of higher value for high art. This conflation is undoubtedly aided by ubiquity of value-laden

terms such as "high," "low," "classical," "good taste," "bad taste," etc. Hence, rejections of the distinction are often ambiguous.

Is there a difference between high and low art?

Although disagreement is more naturally centered on the claim of a hierarchy of artistic value, with traditionalists defending it and relativists or populists denying it, some have argued against the idea that there are artistically important differences between high and popular art. (The less pejorative term "popular art" is generally preferred to "low art"; e.g. Novitz in 1989 and 1992 contrasts high art with popular art, whereas Carroll 1998 contrasts high art with mass art.)

An early defender of popular art, David Novitz, denies that there is a significant distinction between high and low art. He says that "there are neither formal nor affective properties which distinguish the high from the popular in art" (1992: 24). Noël Carroll (1998) labels the denial of a high–low distinction "eliminativism." Novitz's argument for eliminativism centers on finding counterexamples to the properties that are often assumed to necessarily distinguish high arts from popular art. However, this does nothing to show that there do not tend to be broad differences across the high–low art spectrum. It appears that Novitz's main aim is to defend the value of popular art and to debunk the status of the high arts, but to that end he has conflated the question of whether there are differences with the question of whether these differences add up to greater aesthetic value for high art.

The eliminativist argument (see Carroll 1998 for analysis) seems to depend on two assumptions called into question by the cluster model: (i) that the distinction is solely based on art forms or genres and (ii) essentialism about what differentiates work in those forms, i.e. that works in high and popular art forms must *necessarily* have certain features or else the distinction collapses. This assumption underlies Novitz's inference: "It is often suggested that formal simplicity is the hallmark of popular art … [b]ut only a moment's reflection shows that not all popular art is either simple or bland" (Novitz 1989: 215). The cluster model implies that these assumptions are mistaken.

Carroll rejects eliminativism. However, he argues that the main contrast is between high art and mass art – a term he prefers to "popular art" because he believes that the creation of a new sort of mass-produced popular art has occurred over the last two centuries.

Carroll proposes three conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for something to be mass art. It must be:

(1) a multiple instance or type artwork;
(2) produced and distributed by a mass technology;
(3) "intentionally designed to gravitate in its structural choices (for example, its narrative forms, symbolism, intended affect and even its content) toward those choices that promise accessibility with minimum effort … for the largest number of untutored (or relatively untutored) audiences."

(Carroll 1998: 196)

The third condition is especially important here, for its language reflects a nonessentialist approach to defining mass art. And its emphasis on easy accessibility reflects the properties sketched in the cluster model. To make a work broadly accessible, it must be constructed to avoid difficulties and challenges. The work must possess a familiar accessible form and incorporate content that has broad appeal. (See Fisher 2004 for worry that "mass art" is not necessarily art, contrary to Carroll's position.)

Is high art more valuable?

Few thinkers deny that there tend to be systematic differences between high art and popular art. These differences are highlighted in the cluster model. But even in regard to the cluster model it can be asked whether, for example, work that is formally focused or explores uncommon emotions is necessarily more aesthetically valuable than work that is more accessible, explores familiar emotions or stimulates the body more than the intellect. Although the debate can be formulated on both the level of art forms/genres and the level of properties, it is more commonly expressed in terms of forms and genres.

There appear to be three general attitudes toward the distinction. First, elitism: the view that the high arts are artistically more valuable on the whole because they primarily encourage the values alluded to in the high art cluster. Second, populism: the view that the arts of popular culture are more alive, authentic, meaningful and on the whole more artistically valuable for modern audiences than the arts of high culture. Third, pluralism: the view that artworks in both popular and high forms and genres can have great artistic value. One such pluralist position would say that popular artworks are aesthetically valuable as measured by the same standards as traditional high art; another version of pluralism would emphasize the different aesthetic values embodied by popular and high art forms and genres. For example, harmonic development and counterpoint is a primary value in classical music, but in jazz it is improvisation that is central and in popular song it is realistic emotional expression.

Populism is more commonly the position of fans of popular entertainment genres than it is a well-developed theory. Shusterman notes that "defenses of popular art are not common, partly because most pop culture enthusiasts do not consider the intellectual critique either relevant or powerful enough to be worthy of response. They see no need to defend their taste against what they regard as weird attacks of uptight intellectuals" (1993: 216). The motivation behind populism is perhaps better expressed by pluralism. Noël Carroll (1998) has articulated and defended the value of mass art in general, and Ted Gracyk (1996, 2007a) has defended the artistic value of rock music in particular by arguing that the aesthetic interests of rock music are different from the interests highlighted in classical music, such as complex harmonic development. Shusterman (1991) has also defended various genres of popular music (country, funk) and entertainment (Shusterman 2003). Pluralist thinkers make multiple points. They can praise the artistic value of the very properties that tend to characterize popular art, such as bodily engagement, or dispute the alleged flaws in popular arts – for instance, that they encourage passive reception (Carroll 1998) – or question the validity of the ideals of high art, such as the veneration of artist genius.

Elitism takes different forms. One prominent elitist, Roger Scruton, frames his position in terms of high Western culture, which he takes,

> to denote an acquisition … which opens the hearts, minds and senses of those who possess it to an intellectual and artistic patrimony. Culture, as I shall describe it in this book is the creation and creator of elites. … Although an elite product, its meaning lies in emotions and aspirations that are common to all.
>
> (Scruton 2007: 1)

For Scruton, it is the role that high art plays in preserving (high) culture that makes it especially valuable. He ridicules popular culture as lacking judgment; he asserts that proponents of popular arts tell us "that all those venerable masterpieces can be ignored with impunity, that reality TV is 'as good as' Shakespeare … since nothing is better than anything else and all claims to aesthetic value are void" (2007: 10).

Scruton defends a conservative version of elitism in which canonic works are most valuable because they illuminate the universal truths of the human condition and because they are intrinsically valuable when judged aesthetically. "We do not judge them by measuring those good effects. On the contrary, we judge them on their intrinsic merits" (2007: 49).

Scruton's defense of the canon of masterpieces needs to be supported by reasons why the culture of popular artworks lacks aesthetic judgments, universal human values and so on. Scruton's conservative elitism cannot be taken as a description of how the concept of high art is actually deployed, for, in addition to criticizing contemporary popular culture, he is highly critical of some prominent strains of high art, namely avant-garde art: "Avant-gardism should be understood, I believe, as the last gasp of a romantic illusion" (1997: 471). This criticism contrasts with a common view of art history as a progressive march of ever more sophisticated artworks toward avant-garde art. (Carroll, for example, tends to associate high art with the avant-garde: "contemporary high art … is primarily avant-garde art"; 1998: 179.)

Avant-garde elitism was famously expressed by the composer Milton Babbitt in his provocative essay, "Who Cares If You Listen?" (1958). He argues that difficult, mathematically based music that only a few can understand should be viewed as valuable in just the way that advanced physics or math research is: "if it be contended that research, even in its least 'practical' phases, contributes to the sum of knowledge in the particular realm, what possibly can contribute more to our knowledge of music than a genuinely original composition?" He implies that such uniquely original compositions are valuable objects in themselves, as objects of pure musical cognition, not necessarily as objects to be enjoyed by ordinary lovers of classical music.

While critical of many features of Scruton's defense of high culture, Hamilton develops a defense of "classics" that includes classics of popular culture. Appealing to some of the properties in the cluster concept, such as skill and originality, he finds that "Classics in the living sense, which exist in the present, are found in all the arts" (Hamilton 2009: 403). Hamilton describes his position as a "meritocratic middle way between elitism and populism." Where is the value in "classics" of pop culture other than their commercial success as works of a certain genre? Hamilton's

answer is, "one should recognize that even popular classics are created through selection and judgement – and so are in that sense elite products with a communal reference, serving a shared way of life."

It is common when addressing the issue of the superior value of high art over popular arts and entertainment (should one prefer the former to the latter even if the latter give equal or greater pleasure?) to refer to J. S. Mill's famous attempt in *Utilitarianism* to distinguish pleasures by their *quality* in addition to their quantity. In brief, Mill argued that there were higher and lower pleasures, with the higher being superior and intrinsically more valuable and desirable. Mill claims that those who know both sorts of pleasures will prefer the pleasures afforded by the higher faculties of intellect and moral sentiment to those afforded by the lower faculties, which are understood to be the more physical pleasures. (Mill's notion of higher and lower pleasures can be traced back to Plato's dialogues; Gibbs 1986.) In its emphasis on the higher faculties, Mill's division reflects some of the high art threads in the cluster model, but his claim that we would prefer the higher is widely doubted. Levinson, however, does endorse Mill's test: "as John Stuart Mill famously observed, the best, and possibly the only, evidence of one satisfaction or experience being better than another is the considered, ultimate, 'decided' preference for the one over the other by those fully acquainted with and appreciative of both" (2002: 234).

Goldman shares the conventional skepticism about Mill's test: "Unfortunately, Mill's claim is not borne out by experience" (1995: 173). Goldman offers instead a sort of cognitive basis for claiming that the enjoyment of high art involves superior pleasures:

> Pleasures are deeper in this sense when they result from meeting challenges and when they involve cognitive capacities as well as sensation and feeling. More superficial pleasures are "mindless" and escapist in the sense of escape from vigorous mental activities. Pleasures that derive from satisfying engagement of all our mental capacities operating together are more deeply or thoroughly satisfying, and it is these kinds of pleasure that appreciating fine art affords.
>
> (Goldman 1995: 176)

Huovinen (2008) also implies the superiority of cognitive experience by arguing that classical music requires more sophisticated listening than does popular music; it requires listeners to possess music-theoretical concepts. This leads him to consistently speak of "high" and "higher" levels of musical understanding. Yet, even if we concede that complex formal structures are central to classical music and intended to be objects of appreciative understanding, why would that make the music more aesthetically valuable than music that does not present these formal difficulties? The answer is likely to be located in the superior value of enjoying such formal structures or of exercising "higher" faculties in understanding such structures and the problems that they address and solve.

Finally, claims such as these need to be distinguished from claims that appeal to the instrumental value of experiencing art. Goldman claims that the experience of the most challenging art is valuable in itself; in Levinson's terminology experiences of the best artworks "are more worth having" (2002: 233–36) than experiences of

lesser artworks. Yet, frequently arguments for the value of a genre focus on the instrumental value of such works rather than the value of the experience in itself.

This is common in defenses of humor. For example, using the principle that "artworks fostering attitudes conducive to human flourishing are better, *ceteris paribus*, than artworks that promote harm to humans" (2009: 76), Morreall argues that comedies are more valuable than tragedies because in "responding to life's problems, what comedy recommends is not emotions but thinking … [and] the good of the group trumps the good of the individual" (2009: 82). These are instrumental reasons for asserting that comedy is valuable. These are not the sort of reasons that proponents of high art seem to favor. Moreover, if we locate the argument between high and low art in the realm of instrumental value, it is not obvious that high art has the advantage. It was once believed that the high arts made people better – they were edifying – and that low or entertainment arts made people worse, but the actual situation is clearly more complicated than that.

See also Taste (Chapter 25), Aesthetic universals (Chapter 26), Film (Chapter 53), Videogames (Chapter 54), Comics (Chapter 55).

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