

Philosophy in Review



Dominic McIver Lopes, "Being for Beauty: Aesthetic Agency and Value."

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Volume 40, Number 2, May 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1069828ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069828ar>

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Publisher(s)

University of Victoria

ISSN

1206-5269 (print)

1920-8936 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Dearlove, L. (2020). Review of [Dominic McIver Lopes, "Being for Beauty: Aesthetic Agency and Value."]. *Philosophy in Review*, 40(2), 70–72.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1069828ar>

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Dominic McIver Lopes. *Being for Beauty: Aesthetic Agency and Value.* Oxford University Press 2018. 288 pp. \$65.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780198827214).

Dominic Lopes is already well known within aesthetics for putting forward innovative approaches to old problems, and his new book is an attempt to answer what he views as the most ‘primitive’ question of aesthetics, a question of what place aesthetics has in the good life (or perhaps, ‘Why is the aesthetic valuable?’).

The book does not unfold as might be expected from that question, and ‘innovative’ is certainly the word for the path of argument followed. The primitive question, Lopes argues, cannot be solved via aesthetic hedonism, described as the ‘party line,’ an unquestioned truism within aesthetics. Lopes wants instead to put forward a social network theory to explain aesthetic value, but he must first show why it is required by revealing the inadequacies of hedonism. This argument begins in chapter 1 with Lopes suggesting six explananda of aesthetic life derived from studying six disparate aesthetic agents, including a garden designer, a photographer and editor of photography, and Oprah Winfrey in the act of founding and coordinating her book club. The explananda derived from these aesthetic agents cover six points concerning where aesthetic experts are found (in all demographic niches), what they do (great many and varied things, not all concerning the fine arts) and how they specialize (by both domain and activity within and across domains). The final explanandum is that aesthetic expertise is relatively stable; it is a real trait, not a feature of luck or accident.

In chapter 2, Lopes lays down a foundational part of his argument, which is that not all aesthetic acts are acts of appreciation; we can evaluate that a painting in a distant gallery is worth visiting prior to appreciating it, and that evaluation is an aesthetic act; aesthetic evaluation, in fact, occurs in *all* aesthetic acts, in a way that appreciation does not. Lopes moves on to some dense work on aesthetic reasons for action, declining to answer the ‘aesthetic question’ (what makes a value, and thus a reason for action, aesthetic; the lack of an answer to this question is likely to be felt as a real lack by some readers), punting the problem by relying on unquestioned ‘paradigm’ aesthetic values. Besides punting on the aesthetic question, and despite the book’s title, no definition of beauty or any other ‘paradigm’ aesthetic value is given either. This reduces the normative problem—why we aesthetically *should* act—to what Lopes calls ‘plain vanilla normativity.’ We have reasons to act based on our evaluation of value, and the fact that a value is aesthetic is by the by.

Part II opens with chapter 3, where Lopes uses his groundwork to undermine hedonism. He construes hedonism as an objective approach to the aesthetic (contra Kant, though Kant is not discussed here) and as utilitarian – our aesthetic reason to act, under hedonism, is to maximize our pleasure. Here he enters into an interesting discussion of Hume’s true judges and the ‘Levinhume’ solution to the problem of why we should care what the true judges prefer, given our already-existing preferences, ending in the conclusion that under hedonism we should want to act as the true judges do were we really aiming to live our best aesthetic lives. Chapter 4 then turns this construal of hedonism towards the six explananda found in chapter 1, and finds it wanting, as well as damaging to his reading of Levinhume’s true judges, arguing that in fact our ‘aesthetic personalities’ give us reason to act against the preferences of the true judges. The conclusion is that aesthetic hedonism is inadequate, and a new theory is required.

Part III begins with chapter 5 where he lays the groundwork for the network theory, where the normative question leans not on true judges but on aesthetic experts, who consistently and competently achieve in performing particular aesthetic acts. Here he begins to approach the problem of ‘gerrymandered’ expertise, where an agent disguises an aesthetic failure in one practice by claiming

it a success in a new and unique aesthetic practice. Chapter 6 takes an interesting look at the social structures of aesthetic activity, acknowledging our aesthetic interdependence, and arguing that co-operation leads to specialization (in terms of prehistorical personal decoration through body paint, specialization occurs on the axes of both how the paint is applied, whether blended or in a sharper ‘tattoo’ style the prehistorical equivalent of the smoky eye vs. cat eye, and how the paint is made, whether to *be* blended or sharply applied—the prehistorical equivalent of eyeshadow vs. liquid liner). This leads to increasing specialization, and to stop a gerrymandered ‘specialist’ inventing a new aesthetic practice they excel in on the spot, Lopes stipulates that aesthetic networks must be actual, not notional; an aesthetic practice must exist, and we must be a member of it, to achieve in it (presumably an aesthetic practice requires a minimum of two adherents to exist, though Lopes does not specify this). The next chapter offers the first pass of the network theory and runs it through the explananda offered in chapter 1, much more satisfactorily, Lopes argues, than hedonism managed.

Part IV begins with chapter 8, applying the network theory to real world aesthetic psychology; do we think and act as if this theory were true? He points out that we can succeed in aesthetic arenas where we feel no aesthetic pleasure; aesthetic pleasure is predicted by the network theory, but it is neither constitutive nor essential. In chapter 9 Lopes applies the network theory to aesthetic dispute, arguing that his theory assumes aesthetic perspectivism, not relativism. In chapter 10 the author considers the metaphysics of aesthetic properties (or value facts, as Lopes writes), rejecting identifying aesthetic value facts with non-aesthetic facts but rather *grounding* them in non-aesthetic facts. This leads to an argument that distinguishes grounding facts from *anchoring* facts, which determine the profile of an aesthetic practice. Lopes dismisses anchoring facts as explaining aesthetic value facts.

Part V is a response to the primitive question, beginning in chapter 11, by dealing with aesthetic sceptics; how do we persuade a sceptic who is not part of our aesthetic practice to join us? This returns us to the idea of the aesthetic personality, which reads under network theory as worryingly restrictive; a food writer is encouraged not to learn the violin but to attempt reviewing movies instead as she is more likely to achieve in that activity, even though engaging with the aesthetic only in the hope of achievement (the reduction of the aesthetic to a form of productivity) seems a little nightmarish. The sections on the impact of the aesthetic on meaning and happiness are charming, though brief. Chapter 12 turns the primitive question into a collective one, asking what role community and government should have in the aesthetic, utilizing an argument of Beardsley’s on the difference between aesthetic wealth and aesthetic welfare and arguing for aesthetic diversity on the grounds that, in an aesthetic ‘monoculture,’ some would lack the capacities for achievement. Instead, we should educate broadly on aesthetic ‘hubs,’ from which we could specialize into the various ‘spokes’ if preferred. These last two chapters contain many interesting stepping-off points, which will, hopefully, encourage further discussion.

This summary barely scratches the surface of a dense and difficult book, which covers an impressive amount of argument, as is clearly necessary to build an entirely new theory against the grain of general thought in aesthetics. I have attempted to give as full a summary as possible, as each stage of the argument will entice a very different aesthetician. But the sheer scale and scope of the book, while bold and interesting, also works against it. Arguments that could have taken up an entire article are necessarily concluded in the space of a few paragraphs, meaning that even readers sympathetic to Lopes’ position will find sticking points and unsatisfactory arguments, and sceptics will certainly need more work. Lopes notes himself that this should help sceptics to clarify and strengthen their own positions, or give him some purchase to clarify and strengthen his own argument, or allow for a third possibility to emerge. Kantians are likely to be particularly difficult, as Kant is largely

ignored, curious for a book on aesthetic hedonism, but it does make sense to avoid Kant's subjective conception of the aesthetic, given that Lopes holds that aesthetic properties are objective. Lopes' distinctive between aesthetic evaluation and appreciation makes less sense under a Kantian conception where the aesthetic is a feature of experience, not an object; whatever evaluation is being made when we determine we must visit a gallery to view a painting, it is not for Kant an aesthetic evaluation. Humeans may also dispute Lopes' construal of the true judges, though the in-depth section on the Levinhume deduction is a useful excavation of some of the nuances of the position. This book is only the beginning of a theory, and likely the beginning of much discussion.

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