

Aesthetic Disinterestedness. An Essay on Art, Experience, and the Self

Throughout the history of modern aesthetics, it often has been argued that a person's aesthetic engagement with a work of art is disinterested, and that one consequently has to understand the nature of disinterestedness in order to understand the nature of aesthetic experiences. Recently, though, notions of disinterestedness have faced a great deal of criticism. In spite of this criticism, I argue that one cannot reject such a notion, if one wishes to understand the nature of the aesthetic experience of art. In my book, then, I introduce and defend a new and sophisticated account of disinterestedness, and prove its value for our understanding of art and the aesthetic. In particular, I claim that a person's aesthetic engagement with a work of art is disinterested, with the major effect that it makes her temporarily *lose her sense of self*.

Overall, my conception of the aesthetic experience of art is very Kantian. So, I take it that a person's aesthetic engagement with a work of art consists of a play-like interaction among her sensuous, affective, and cognitive capacities. Moreover, I assume that this engagement impacts her in three related ways: it makes her temporarily lose her sense of self, it makes her gain a sense of the other, and it ultimately makes her achieve selfhood.

My book has four chapters. In the first chapter, I introduce the core elements of my notion of aesthetic disinterestedness, which I primarily arrive at through a critical discussion of the aesthetic theories offered by Kant, Schopenhauer, and Edward Bullough. In order to clear the way for a fresh look at the notion of disinterestedness, I address the most serious objections against the coherence and usefulness of this notion in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, I explain what exactly it means to have or to lose one's sense of self, and I identify the conditions for having or losing such a sense. In Chapter Four, I show that my notion of disinterestedness is not merely some theoretical construct. That is, I show that the conditions of reception established by the various artistic media typically conflict with the conditions of having a sense of one's own specific self, and therefore make a recipient temporarily lose that sense. I conclude the book by exploring the ethical values of aesthetic disinterestedness.