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ZANGWILL, NICK. The Metaphysics of Beauty. Cornell University Press, 2001, xi + 224 pp., $39.95 cloth.

This book is a compilation of papers that Zangwill has had published previously in a number of journals; this journal among them. The topics of these papers centre on the nature of aesthetic properties. Read as such, the papers are, for the most part, erudite and illuminating, presenting as they do a very clear synthesis of various well known positions on the relation of aesthetic properties to non-aesthetic properties; the relation of beauty to other aesthetic concepts; and the nature of the aesthetic. However, the presentation of these various papers as chapters in a book entitled the Metaphysics of Beauty, leads us to expect a cohesive and coherent theory of beauty. It is in the setting up of this expectation that the book lets the reader down.

Zangwill identifies two kinds of aesthetic properties: evaluative (which Zangwill calls verdictive) and non-evaluative (which Zanwill refers to as substantive). Beauty and ugliness are evaluative aesthetic properties while aesthetic concepts like dumpy, delicate and so on, denote non-evaluative aesthetic properties. According to Zangwill, the evaluative aesthetic properties are determined by the non-evaluative aesthetic properties. That is, beauty is

determined by other aesthetic properties. Zangwill considers that there is a hierarchy of aesthetic properties with beauty at the top. He calls this a determination theory of beauty and he sets this theory out in the first two chapters.

In chapter three, Zangwill presents the thesis that beauty supervenes on formal aesthetic properties. He does not argue for, explain, nor demonstrate through examples, as to why we should accept the thesis that beauty is determined by formal aesthetic properties. Furthermore, it is not clear what Zangwill takes to be the relation between the evaluative and non-evaluative distinction of the previous two chapters, and formal aesthetic properties. Presumably, formal aesthetic properties are *non-evaluative* aesthetic properties, as Zangwill has identified only beauty and ugliness as evaluative aesthetic properties. It would have been very helpful, at this point, had Zangwill provided some examples of formal aesthetic properties. As it is, the notion of formal aesthetic properties remains unclear.

'Dainty' and 'dumpy' are used to exemplify non-evaluative aesthetic properties. Zangwill stipulates that all aesthetic properties (this would mean both evaluative and non-evaluative) supervene on non-aesthetic properties. Furthermore, Zangwill differentiates between two kinds of non-aesthetic property: narrow and broad non-aesthetic properties. Narrow non-aesthetic properties are sensory properties or non-relational physical properties (56); that is, properties we can think of as intrinsic to the object. Broad non-aesthetic properties are anything else, such as contextural relations and historical properties within which the notion of the object is embedded. Presumably broad non-aesthetic properties

would also include properties like, in the case of art works, the art work's price, its status regarding the gallery which exhibits it etc. Zangwill writes: "Formal [aesthetic] properties are entirely [my emphasis] determined by narrow non-aesthetic properties, whereas non-formal aesthetic properties are partly determined by broad non-aesthetic properties"(57). It would have been instructive to know how Zangwill would categorize 'dainty' and 'dumpy'. If he understood them as determined solely by narrow non-aesthetic properties, they would be examples of formal aesthetic properties. If he believes, on the other hand, that whether something is 'dainty' or 'dumpy' is always dependent on the concept against which the appearance of the object is compared, then presumably, 'dainty' and 'dumpy' are not formal aesthetic properties, because such comparison involves an intellectual engagement which, according to Zangwill in this early part of the book, cannot be included in the supervening base for formal aesthetic prooperties. He contradicts this position when he discusses Kant's dependent beauty which he recognises as a genuine case of beauty, but I will get to this later.

The relation between formal aesthetic properties and sensory properties is a crucial point for any theory of beauty which claims that beauty is determined by formal aesthetic properties which, in turn, are understood to supervene on sensory properties. In order to understand what it is about sensory properties which, when perceived, gives rise to the experience of beauty, we need to know which aspect of a sensory property is relevant to the perception of formal aesthetic properties. For example, is it the relation between various sensory properties which gives rise

to the perception of formal aesthetic properties; or is it the spatial arrangement of the sensory properties; or is it their sensuous aspect (the creaminess of cheesecake or the emotional expressiveness of music). The traditional understanding of formal aesthetic properties would suggest that formal aesthetic properties supervene on either a relation between, or the spatial arrangement of, sensory properties. But the apprehension of a relation between sensory properties brings in an intellectual element of one kind or another. Consider the relation between the taste of a particular wine and the taste of steamed fish, and the relative taste of the same wine when matched with roast meat. This aspect of the wine is not its sensuous aspect. Rather, it is its relative taste within different contexts and this relation depends on an intellectual engagement with the object of perception, in this case, the taste of the particular wine. Zangwill denies that the intellectual component of the perception of an object can be a supervening base for beauty (5). Furthermore, the relation between sensory properties would fall outside his notion of narrow non-aesthetic properties. We are left then with the *spatial arrangement* of the sensory properties and their sensuous aspect as relevant to the perception of formal aesthetic properties. If 'formal aesthetic properties' supervened *entirely* on the spatial arrangement of sensory properties (125), this would hardly result in a moderate aesthetic formalism, which is how Zangwill categorises his theory of beauty. This is what we would call extreme formalism. As the relation between sensory properties is not available to him as a supervening base for formal aesthetic properties, Zangwill must admit, then, the sensuous aspect of the sensory property as part of the supervening base for formal aesthetic properties if he is to avoid extreme formalism. To do so, however,

would sever his theory of beauty from the long tradition of beauty theory prior to the twentieth century according to which the sensuous, the good and the beautiful aspects of an object are each quite distinct. However, this does seem to be what Zangwill's notion of a formal aesthetic property amounts to. Formal aesthetic properties are all those aesthetic properties which supervene on narrow non-aesthetic properties and this includes as the supervening base both the sensuous aspects of an object and the spatial arrangement of its sensory properties.

Zangwill believes that spatial properties are quite distinct from sensory properties (132-133), yet he writes 'the beauty of a particular painting must, at least in part, be identified with, realised in, or constituted by, the spatial arrangement of colors' (185). This is really as close as he gets to stating the relation between sensory properties and the formal aesthetic properties which are meant to supervene upon them. *The spatial arrangement of* sensory properties is clearly, then, a necessary condition for formal aesthetic properties but, according to Zangwill, the necessary conditions must also include the sensuous aspect itself, as acknowledged by him when he writes: 'Lovers of beauty are indeed lovers of sights and sounds' (144).

Zangwill cannot deploy the notion of aspect perception as he interprets aspect perception as subjective (30) and his neo-Kantian project (at his own admittance) would preclude this. However, the various processes involved in perception and the variety of ways that we can focus upon an object suggest that perception is always rightly understood as perception of an aspect of the object. For example we can focus on an object in terms of its function, or its anticipated

benefits to the perceiver, or its appearance as measured against a concept of the object, or its appearance per se or its form in particular and so on. The more traditional terms for these aspects, are the sensuous (some would call this aesthetic) or the functional (semantic) or the structural or the configurational (the latter two are usually conflated into the formal aesthetic). This understanding of perception actually fits in quite nicely with a neo-Kantian formulation of beauty. However, without this understanding of perception, one can be lead into certain errors regarding the notion of the aesthetic. For example, Zangwill writes: "As the etymological origins of the word 'aesthetic' suggest, aesthetic properties are those that we appreciate in perception "(144). This leads him to conclude that the object of beauty is limited to sights and sounds (144). However, Zangwill equivocates on this point, introducing both the intellectual aspect of an object (Ch.4) and, as we have already see, the spatial arrangement of sensory properties (185) into the supervening base of formal aesthetic properties.

When Zangwill defends Kant's notion of dependent beauty as a genuine case of beauty, he unwittingly contradicts his claim that beauty is determined by formal aesthetic properties which in turn supervene on narrow non-aesthetic properties as defined by him. Kant's notion of dependent beauty, according to Zangwill, is beauty judged against a concept of the object's function. Beauty, then, surely can't be just a matter of sights and sounds. Judging an object's beauty against a concept of its function is bringing the intellect to bear upon the measuring of the object's merit. Dependent beauty, then, supervenes, at least in part, on broad non-aesthetic properties. Furthermore, if an object can be

dependently beautiful in terms of fitting to its function (ch.4), then why not dependently beautiful in relation to other closely related concepts such as, in the case of art works, fitting to its artistic genre; fitting to contemporary notions of fashion; fitting to the art dealer's idea of what can be sold for large sums of money (all could be considered the function of art works in certain contexts), and so on. This brings us right back to the popular and rather debased concept of beauty according to which 'it's beautiful' is hardly more than a proclamation of approval.

Zangwill pins his formalist identity on distinguishing his position from the contexturalist. Beauty supervenes ultimately on intrinsic properties of the object; not on the object's context or history. He wants to say he is a moderate formalist because he allows that there are non-formal aesthetic properties that supervene (in part) on broad non-aesthetic properties. His moderate formalism sees him admit that art works can have properties of artistic merit that are not aesthetic properties; they can have aesthetic properties that are not formal aesthetic properties and that can have formal aesthetic properties. It is presumably only when art works have the latter that they are candidates for beauty although he emphasises that art works can have much artistic merit without beauty. Zangwill spends the first two chapters setting up the theoretical basis for this position. However, the remainder of the book, while presenting some clear and philosophically interesting arguments, does not serve to develop or illustrate his theory. In fact, Zangwill seems to retreat from his moderate formalism into a very weak formalism. A further example of this is when he includes "dispositions

to provoke responses that might be thought to be partly constitutive of aesthetic properties" (57) as a narrow non-aesthetic property of an object and hence a part of the supervening base of formal properties.

In spite of these criticisms, I found this a very interesting read. Of the increasing number of books published over the last couple of years on beauty, this is one of only a couple which deal with the philosophical problems surrounding our understanding of beauty. The chapters when read as self-contained papers are densely packed with nicely constructed philosophical argument. Unfortunately, when read as a whole it does not present a consistent theory of beauty. However, what emerges from the various theses presented in the book, is that the key to understanding beauty is understanding the relation between formal aesthetic properties and sensory properties.

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