

the economy before combating social stigmas present within the Indian sphere of life were instances which finally led Ambedkar in his enunciation to “annihilate” caste structures completely. From here, as the author points out, Ambedkar’s pragmatism leads to the realization of the dichotomy between a religion “of principles” as opposed to “rules” which, in turn, engages with the rhetorical possibilities of religious conversion.

The final chapter draws the conversation to a close after having weighed Ambedkar’s thrust behind individual dignity and freedom as a fundamental clause before any endeavour is made to materialize social progress or experience collective democracy. This includes the autonomy of the individual to hew out one’s own identity and language. Finally, Stroud sums up Ambedkar’s argument regarding the vitality of persuasion (through the rhetorical activity) and finally to the belief that human beings, through whom societies emerge, live through experiences which are contingent, act under morality which is changeable and thus, must engage with critical inquiry to resist the rigidity of the historical past and the perpetuation of its experiences.

While the text has been neatly presented following a couple of central hypotheses, Ambedkar’s intellectual inheritance has been delved into like seldom before. While risking an enthusiastic understanding of Ambedkar’s ‘rhetorical reconstruction’, it does lay out critical issues on both political philosophy and social identity that is supposed to concern Ambedkar as much as his readers or his scholarship. The text, in its own way, deconstructs the singular impression of Ambedkar as an anti-caste icon which, under the weight of his own praxis, has had relegated his intellectual depth and its variety to an eclipsed state which his pragmatic bent of mind had otherwise claim to. The significance of the text must be considerable within both Ambedkarite scholarship and in other disciplines which seek to look into the various issues of social conflict/ cohesion and understand them in terms of socio-political operations of force. The text succeeds to argue that the discourse on ‘reforming’ and ‘reconstructing’ any society must visit Ambedkar’s persuasive methods critically before rounding up all discussion which concerns the thematic even if it leaves enough room for readers to speculate on the failures of Ambedkar’s electoral politics in India at the juncture of its political independence.

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AESTHETIC LIFE AND WHY IT MATTERS. By Dominic Lopes, Bence Nanay, and Nick Riggle. UK: Oxford University Press, 2022. 128 pp.

The last two decades have seen an increased discussion about the role of aesthetics in our lives. The primary argument has been that aesthetics are not superfluous, something to be ashamed of and discussed in secret, nor are they only for members of the upper class. In many ways, Elaine Scarry’s *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) marks the beginning of this renewed discourse, which has been added to more recently by texts like Byung-Chul Han’s *Saving Beauty* (2015) and Timothy Aubry’s *Guilty Aesthetic Pleasures* (2018). Whereas texts like these focus on reframing the concept of beauty and the validity of aesthetic pleasure more broadly, *Aesthetic Life and Why It Matters* by Dominic McIver Lopes, Bence Nanay, and Nick Riggle distinguishes itself from existing scholarship by choosing a more grounded approach.

From the onset, *Aesthetic Life and Why It Matters* is framed as a resource that can be used by students. This is evident from the authors’ inclusion of a “Note for Instructors” section right before the formal introduction, in which they propose that the book is a conversation starter, rather than a self-contained discussion. Whereas the introduction provides the reader with the expected summary of the chapters and a preview of the issues that will be discussed, “Note for Instructors” proposes

further areas of philosophy that can be drawn upon to deepen the discussion, such as the question of perception and experience, the various forms of freedom and its connection to autonomy, and the construction of cultural norms. Arguing that “aesthetics is an ideal entry point to value theory, hence to philosophy” (xi), Lopes, Nanay, and Riggle identify the book’s bigger stake in examining how one can find meaning in life by thinking about how to live, how to live better, and how to open oneself up to encounters with objects, people, and places one knows they will like but also those that may challenge one’s preconceived notions.

One of the central arguments of *Aesthetic Life and Why It Matters* is that aesthetics, in addition to being a foundational part of our life, are also multivalent. For this reason, “[t]o live an aesthetic life, you don’t have to ditch Super Mario for *La Traviata*” (5). Lopes, Nanay, and Riggle regularly reiterate the fact that taste as it has come to be associated with wealth and connoisseurship is only a single, limited form that aesthetics can take. Additionally, aesthetic life goes far beyond fine art, permeating the simpler parts of life, such as food and clothing, the choices we all make daily.

The three chapters draw on several key ideas, regularly overlapping with each other. This forms a sense of cohesion, as opposed to the self-containment of edited volumes. Chapter one, “Unlocking Experience” by Nanay, lingers on the argument that aesthetic decision making goes beyond fine art as Nanay invites the reader to consider why we make these decisions and why they seem to play a significant role in our lives. Aesthetic judgement and aesthetic experience are the key terms of this chapter. If aesthetic judgement is described as this deliberate process of selection, used for communicating one’s aesthetic identity outwardly or cultivating it inwardly, then aesthetic experience is the awareness of how something makes one feel as they are making these judgements, whether that is positive or negative. Nanay argues that it is not so much the judgements as the experiences we are judging, whether there are works of art or food, that are important to our individual and social lives because “when we have an aesthetic experience, we don’t just attend to the object we see. We also attend to the quality of our experience” (22). For this reason, we might think of some aesthetic experiences as achievements, which occur in part when we engage deeply by tasting, seeing, listening, engaging, thus building an aesthetic language within us.

In chapter two, “Aesthetic Lives: Individuality, Freedom, Community”, Riggle argues in favor of aesthetic decision making, which Riggle suggests is a form of care and a way of diversifying things that are important in our lives that we might otherwise dismiss as insignificant. To make his point, Riggle sets up an analogy between aesthetics and food, the basis of which is as follows: just as food is “whatever’s worth eating [...] where eating is an important social practice” (34), aesthetic value is similarly anything “worthy of being aesthetically valued” because it engages in “a meaningful and complex social practice” (42). An important caveat to Riggle’s analogy is understanding the difference between food and eating. Eating involves more than filling oneself for the basic purpose of sustenance. It is a social practice but also an individual practice, cultivated with an awareness of what is taken in and how it is meaningful to one’s identity, health, and other parts of everyday life. For this reason, Riggle asserts that aesthetic value is fundamentally good and communal while also building an individuality that is both dynamic and social.

Chapter three, “Getting Into It: Ventures in Aesthetic Life”, centers around the idea that “[e]verything that’s aesthetically good or bad is aesthetically good or bad in its own special way” (62–63). Lopes argues that aesthetic value does not carry over because it is not universal. Hence, all aesthetic experiences have their own unique features and aesthetic profiles, so that there is a gradation of terms like “cute” that hinges on factors like unique physical attributes and the social context and history of something. Lopes goes on to suggest that norms are a type of aesthetic profile that have been set up so that people coordinate their actions through conformity. This is not necessarily a negative — in fact, Lopes gives positive examples, like how the colors of a streetlight have been socially coded to facilitate communication while ensuring safety. Aesthetic values therefore have insiders and outsiders. Insiders engage with aesthetic practices. Outsiders either acknowledge these practices but do not

engage with them, or they show indifference by ignoring and not understanding these practices at all. Lopes identifies this as the network theory, which “teaches that there’s no single measure of aesthetic value, but we’re accountable to the norms of our aesthetic communities” (73). Lopes thus returns the reader back to the foundational argument that aesthetic value, and aesthetic life, is inherently social and multivalent, where the cultivation of individual aesthetic value always translates into some form of community.

The key to the book’s tone arguably lies in its concluding section, “Breakout”. Where a scholarly text is preoccupied with carrying through a specific argument and reinforcing it at the end, “Breakout” is a roundtable interview-style discussion with the authors focused on raising additional questions, which regularly spur further discussion. The topics discussed include: aesthetic disagreement; the extent to which we can say aesthetic value is subjective; the Western bias in aesthetic theory; fashion, broadly conceived, as the driver of aesthetic life and the difference between fads and timelessness; and constructions of human beauty. It is this section that reiterates Lopes, Nanay, and Riggle’s commitment to writing a resource in aesthetics rather than another aesthetic theory. While some may argue that the references to modern day culture make *Aesthetic Life and Why It Matters* under threat of becoming outdated and out of touch, depending on how relevant someone like Megan Thee Stallion, who is one of the specific contemporary examples given in the text, remains in our culture, this approach should be seen as a practical manifestation of the very points made within the text and of challenging the classism that aesthetics is still bound up in.

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES. By Jeffrey Cohen & Stephanie Foote (Eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 379 pp.

The concept of Environmental Humanities is ever emerging and growing field especially in the present scenario, wherein the queries and questions of existence have hit the world harder and deeper. This book is a collection of critical essays by researchers, academicians and authors reflecting various aspects of environmental humanities and exploring the development of the concepts that narrow down to understanding value of nature and its intrinsic relation with human body, mind and soul. It initiates the discussion with Stephanie Foote and Jeffery Jerome Cohen’s essay enlightening the scope of the field, its future and the ongoing pandemic and catastrophe as a reminder of the interconnectedness between humans and non-humans. Stephanie LeMenager in the essay “The Commons” further explores the value of sustainable approach towards nature and talks about such ownership as commons which is ‘justice-oriented’, and against predatory capitalism and prejudiced colonialism. Taking it further, Cajetan Iheka narrates views on rights entitled to environment and the urgent need to establish ethical obligation to preserve nature and animals. Kyle Powys Whyte brings up the concept of “Time as Kinship,” talking about Kinship as sense of responsibility that has been a part of indigenous cultures across the world. It is this timing that helps humans to understand their equation with climate change and evolve as empathetic species. Teena Gabrielson highlights the nature studies that should incorporate the neglected gender, class and caste who depend on nature and help to develop and understand nature-human dynamics. This essay delves deeper into Feminist Science Studies, Corporeal Feminism and Environmental Justice. Urmi Engineer Willoughby in “Race, Health and Environment,” elaborates the causes of rampant health crises, as a result of an altered environment; revealing the perspective of “...centrality of race and the racial legacies of European colonization.” (82) The availability, accessibility and prioritization of resources largely depends upon the divisions