Aesthetic values in art

From Hugo A. Meynell (The Nature of Aesthetic Value--Macmillan, 1986)

Some philosophical issues, in confronting the objection that there can be no objective definition of artistic goodness, other than the extent to which large number of people like it...

Not so, he argues: there is an objective standard:

The "goodness" of a work of art with aesthetic value does not lie in the work of art’s use, but rather in its impact on the consumer.

[I.E., art is not like a “hammer”; you can’t tell how good it is simply by “looking at it,” you have to “experience” the product, and thus, the objective nature of its goodness does not lie in the object itself, but rather in the impact it has on the listener (viewer, reader....)]

It is correct to say that you can’t tell by looking at two works of art (theater...), which, if either, represents great art....

The aesthetic value of art in this sense is not an objective concept, but

You can determine (objectively) the impact the work has on individuals, and in this sense, the aesthetic value of art can be determined

A distinction between art and entertainment, however, is that good entertainment must be enjoyed from the outset and by lots of people...not necessarily so with art...[more on this below]

Next question??
How many people (and which people) have to agree on the goodness of art???? Meynell’s answer: A consensus of informed people!

Judgment based both on the aspects of art that are “conducive” to enjoyment, and “constitutive” of such enjoyment: [or the distinction between description and evaluation or technique versus impact.

What makes a good critic, is one who can see both attributes, i.e., a critic must have both significant technical knowledge as well as a real aesthetic sensibility. Note that on the question of the extent to which a work of art is conducive, new works can often fool even the best critics...

➡️ What is this thing called aesthetic satisfaction (as distinct from pleasure)????

For Meynell, a satisfaction gained from the exercise and enlargement of the capacities constitutive of human consciousness, capacities which operate at four levels.

1) human experience (including feelings, moods...a la rock concerts??)
2) understanding
3) judgement, and
4) decision

“good art satisfies us...by exercising our capacities of experience, understanding, judgement and decision...its effect is to militate against limitations of our consciousness which are encouraged by our physical and our social environment. This is the reason for its subversiveness. Bad art, when it is not merely technically incompetent, imposes or reinforces such limitations. [Propaganda? ????] It does not invite experimentation with sensation, feeling, or the exercise of moral judgement...it never explores a conscious point of view which it does not at least implicitly approve; when it condemns, it never understands...”
Good versus bad art...How to tell?

In general, "bad" art enjoyed by more people; and those who do like good art, would not confuse the two.

It is also the case that one can go from enjoying bad art to enjoying good art, but rarely the reverse. Sounds like mere snobbery! Perhaps. Perhaps not. [wine and beer as examples in discussion]

Good art expands the consciousness more than bad art; and this accounts for why most people prefer to be “left alone” with their “thoughts,” i.e., really dig bad art, which requires little thought.

Good art demands considerable attention and learning.

Quoting Coleridge, who suggested that the popular novels of his day had the singular property “of reconciling the two contrary yet co-existing propensities of human nature, namely indulgence of sloth, and hatred of vacancy.” Also known as utter laziness and fear of boredom [an echo of Scitovsky again]

None of this implies a disdain for enjoyment as such!!!!!!, And there’s no reason why, at least at times, a good work of art may do both, entertain and stimulate---a la Shakespeare, Dickens, Italian Opera, etc. etc…

What is the Truth and Ethical Content of Good Art?? (As opposed o the ideas of Bentham and Tocqueville above)

a complex question, requiring a theory of knowledge and of ethics at least...But if truth is to be found by an exercise of all of our human capacities, then back to the discussion above, i.e., an aesthetic experience draws on one’s human capacity beyond mere emotions.

And in this sense, propaganda can’t be good art— and it is easy to understand the tendency of oppressive political regimes to exercise censorship over the arts as seen under dictators (and the Jesse Helms??). “Rock music” equally subversive in Asia??