their skills is infinitely higher. Yet, the concept of the “fine arts” connotes for many a kind of elitism or even snobbery. There are two basic approaches to the issue.

The first proposes that it is all a matter of taste. Some people prefer classical and some pop. Some value Shakespeare and Ibsen and some the weekly TV sitcom. One is not inherently better than the other; they are just different. Further, such tastes are acquired. The relationship between education and the arts is hardly surprising. In the educational process, there is not only exposure to the arts but a consistent socialization as to the value of artistic endeavor. In school we are taught the tastes that we then assume are a sign of superior culture. The differences between fine, folk, and popular culture are in such acquired tastes, not in the nature of the art. Bach and the Beatles are just different forms of music, although one is older and the other more popular.

The other approach stresses such elements of the arts as technical skill, difficulty of preparation, acceptance by “experts,” and endurance over time. It is true that most pop musical groups and compositions last only months or a few years, while the “classics” have lasted through the centuries. Further, most classical artists spend years, even lifetimes, gaining the technical skills for high-level performances. Yet, there is no clear line of division on either skill or longevity.

One other factor, according to some analysis, is social status. For example, the symphony guild is one of the highest status organizations in most communities. The annual guild dinner dance, usually at the country club, may be the major social event of the year. Skill or even musical discrimination have nothing to do with prominence in such an “arts” organization. Further, programs with lists of contributors, dinners before prestige events, and receptions with visiting artists are signs of the social status that is economically based. The arts reflect the community social hierarchy. In this way, support of the arts becomes a symbol of community position. The audience, then, becomes a social construction tied to the symbolic culture and institutional division of the social system. An exclusive focus on the arts and related tastes obscures how the arts become a symbol of social stratification. There is a clear social separation between the Metropolitan Opera and the Grand Old Opry.

This separation is intensified by location, pricing, and requirements of dress and decorum. While there has been some leveling of concert prices between the concert hall and the stadium, in general, prices reinforce exclusion. Audience numbers at pop and rock concerts in outdoor arenas dwarf even the largest symphony or opera audiences. Further, the accepted rules for behavior at classical performances seldom include dancing in the aisles, swarming the stage, or extremely informal attire. All kinds of arts are, after all, also a business. They are marketed to appropriate consumers in ways that clearly differentiate their social status and resources.

Debate: The Fine Arts Are Exclusive and Elitist

Yes

- Participation in the arts, both appreciation and production, is strongly related to higher education. Insofar as higher education is correlated with family income, then arts and socioeconomic status go together. There are even some indications that the status of the university or college is a factor.
Social status is symbolized by many signs; the arts are one such sign. Knowing about the arts, joining arts organizations, and being seen at prestige performances are all status symbols. Having the "right" taste and knowing the proper vocabularies of arts discourse demonstrate higher social status to society's gatekeepers. Bourdieu calls this "cultural capital."

The costs of acquiring skills in the arts make it likely that performers will come from families with financial resources. Very few kids from the projects, however talented, will make it into a major orchestra. The exceptions are usually funded by well-endowed programs in major cities.

In contrast to a pop or rock concert, the fine arts require "proper" conduct at their programs. One does not go to an art gallery opening in jeans, smoke cigars and drink beer at the ballet, or dance in the aisles at the opera. One has to be taught how to behave.

The fine arts have their own lines of inclusion and exclusion. While modern art may occasionally break those boundaries, traditions have great power to accept or reject. Further, there are educated, official critics who decide for others what is acceptable. These critics are usually based in the elite media or institutions.

The canons of acceptance are not a matter of popular acceptance or the market. Rather, New York Times critics and Ivy League faculty are the authorities on what is good. The fine arts have their anointed gatekeepers of taste, quality, and acceptance.

Perhaps most important, the fine arts are a kind of closed corporation in which all of the symbols of social status—education, cultural knowledge, modes of communication, and connections—come together so completely that anyone can tell in a moment who fits in and who does not.

No

All education includes the arts. Almost every public school provides introductions to the arts, both appreciation and performance. Now there are public high schools in the poorer sections of major cities that specialize in arts preparation. Universities provide scholarships and even seek out the talented from deprived backgrounds. There are countless programs to open the arts to people from all levels of society.

The results of such programs are gradual, but real. Major orchestras are no longer just white and male. The world of the arts is opening up in a systematic program designed to break down the old exclusive barriers. Even national barriers are falling and artists may come from anywhere in the world.

Public programs do more than admit a few scholarship students. Established artists are forming companies and educational programs in East Harlem and Watts. There is a strong conviction among those in the fine arts that there is ability everywhere and that the arts are an enrichment for any life.

The old distinctions are becoming blurred. Leading artists perform on television. Concerts are mixed in their offerings. The technical and artistic quality of some television
drama may be quite high. There are "crossover" artists who play a variety of music and who refuse to make any clear separation between the classical and the popular. Who would exclude American jazz from the arts? Jazz developed in the midst of poverty and racial exclusion, sometimes in bordellos.

- There is also a blurring of the lines between the folk and fine arts. In music, ceramics, drama, dance, and other art forms, the formerly rigid standards of the classical are being broken down. Such change may be controversial, but one aim is to make art more accessible to more people. The appreciation of beauty, after all, should not require a graduate education or an investment portfolio.

- Now "stars" in the arts may come from anywhere—from Kansas or China. The arts, ideally, are a true meritocracy. In the end, all that really counts is that the artist be good at his or her art. It may be true that there has long been a connection between social status and the arts, but that is really a violation of the nature of art in which all that matters is doing it well.

Creation and Appreciation in the Arts

It is clear that the arts involve both production and consumption. The performing arts require those who attend and understand the performance. So there is skill involved in both production and appreciation. Further, while the artist may become totally absorbed in creation, in the end there is the presentation to others. Art is not an isolated act.

Arts Creation and Production

There seems to be something special about arts production. Doing and creating in the arts primarily for the experience, as leisure, are different from even the most informed appreciation. There is an investment of the self and an identification with what is created that is missing in appreciating the work of others. This difference may be illustrated in the engagement that Robert Stebbins calls being an "amateur."4

Modern amateurs, according to Stebbins, are not just messing around with an art or an activity. The amateur is neither a professional gaining a major part of her income from the craft nor one who occasionally dabbles in the activity. Rather, there is a sustained commitment to acquiring a high level of skill. The standards for the amateur are the same as for the professional. The amateur does the art in a highly systematic and disciplined way. An amateur violinist practices regularly, obtains help in improving skills, and is a regular member of one or more orchestras or chamber groups. This investment of the self in the art or other activity is central to the amateur's identity. Further, the commitment usually involves being part of a community of amateurs who form a significant social group. For the true amateur, there is always the challenge of further improvement in skill. At the same time, there may be an immersion in doing the activity for its own sake, for the experience. The appreciative audience is only part of the context of creation.