

*De gustibus  
non est  
disputandum?*



# Guiding Question

- What does it mean to have **productive** ethical disagreements?



# A Consulting Gig

- You are an acquisitions consultant for the Harvard Art Museum. The museum's director wants your honest, personal opinion about which new piece to acquire.
- Evaluative Criteria: Looking for a piece that “**exemplifies the value of art.**”
  - *Do not need to care about artist, school, filling a gap in the museum's collections, etc.*

#1









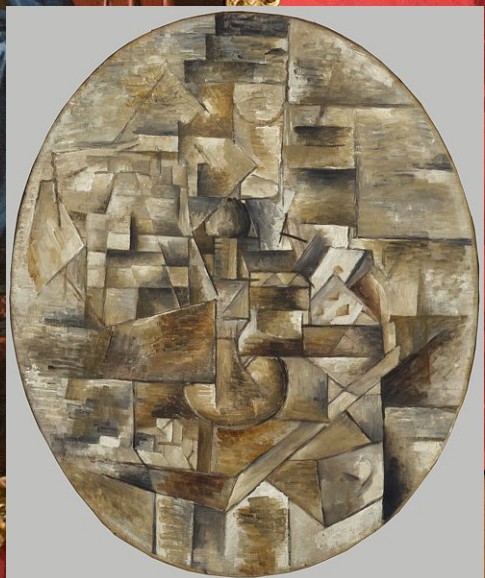
#1



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#4







*Portrait of a Young Man*

Bronzino, 1530s





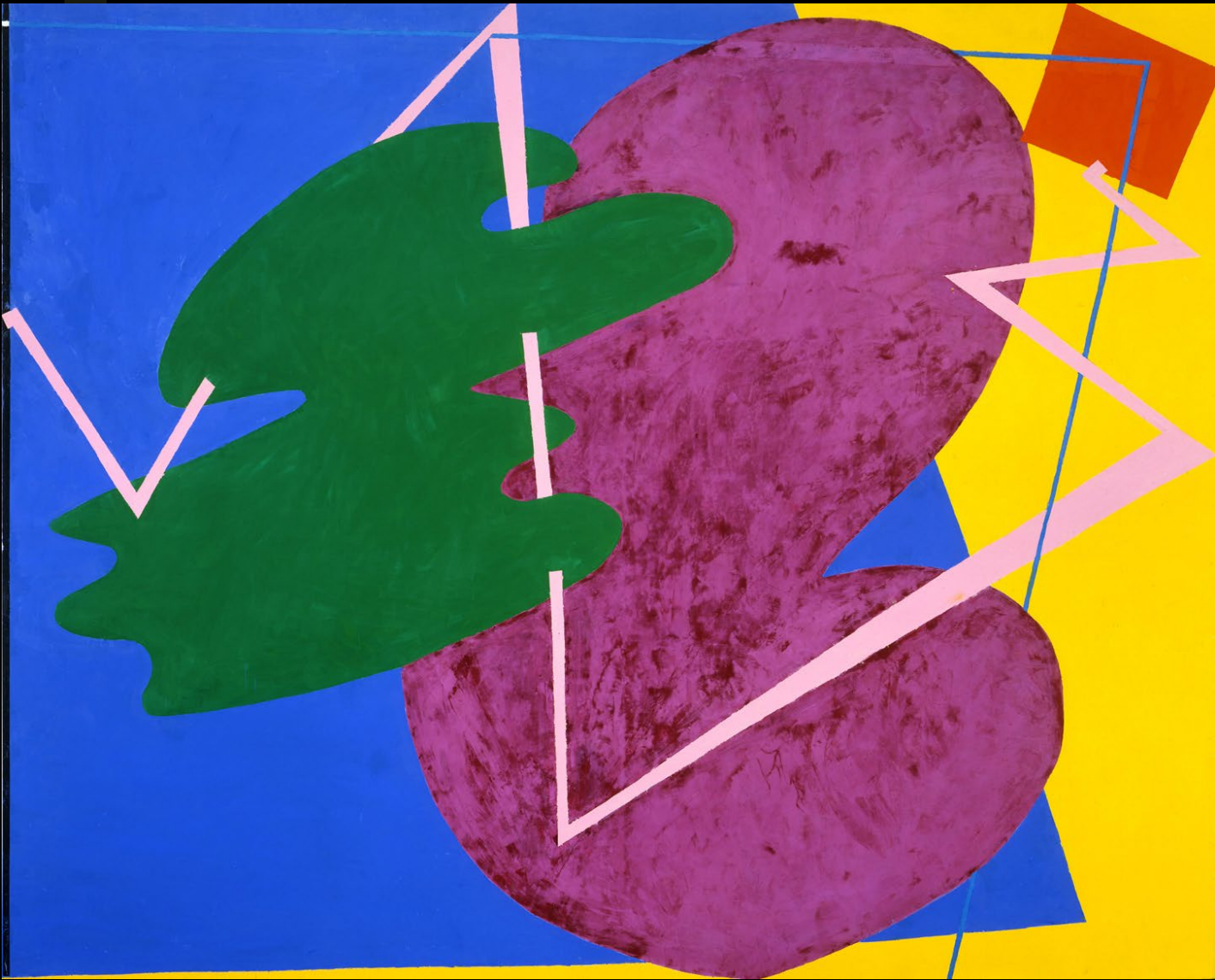


*The Death of Socrates*  
Jacques-Louis David,  
1787



*Candlestick and Playing  
Cards on a Table*

Georges Braque, 1910



*Children Meeting*  
Elizabeth Murray,  
1978

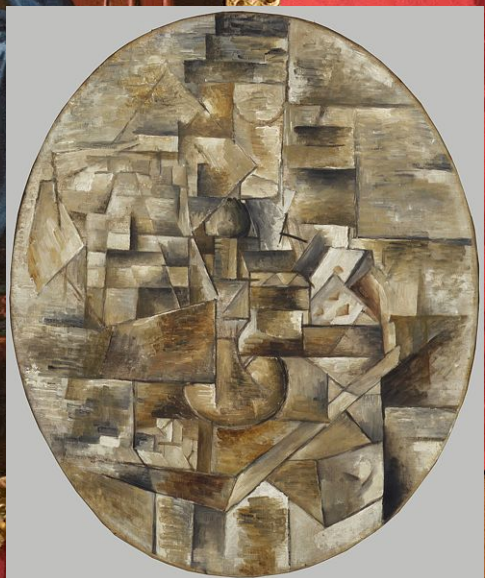
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# Challenges to Productive Discussion

## Aesthetics

- Are all tastes created equal?
- Disputed standards of merit
- Need for judgment
- Emotional investment

## Ethics

- Objective or relative?
- Disputed normative frameworks
- Need for judgment
- Emotional investment
- Practical reason
- Highest of stakes



**The moral of the story...**

# Disagreement about art/ethics can be at the level of first principles.

When this is the case, it may not be reasonable to expect discussion to lead to conversion. Nevertheless, the conversation can still be productive (e.g., better understanding of others' perspective, you're forced to articulate your own perspective, etc.)

# **Not all disagreements about art/ethics are at the level of first principles.**

When you disagree with someone who is operating within the same value framework as you, rational persuasion is more reasonable productive goal of the discussion (although the burdens of judgment may still make reasonable disagreement possible).

**Either way, productive conversation begins by trying to understand the value frameworks others (and you yourself) bring to the issues.**

You need to know what common premises you share with others to know how to persuasively reason with them, and you need to know your own premises to present coherent defenses of your intuitions.