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# OBJECTIVE AESTHETIC VALUES IN ART

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## Abstract

This dissertation defends an answer to the question: to what extent, if any, are aesthetic values in art objective? I defend what I call Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism, which can be summarised as follows.

A work of art has a certain aesthetic value if and only if a human critic, in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of that work, would experience the work as having that aesthetic value. 'Experience' here is meant in a broad sense, encompassing imagination and understanding as well as perception. We should regard such a critic as someone who would detect the aesthetic value rather than make it the case that the work had that value. Experiencing a work as being aesthetically valuable in a certain way involves having an aesthetic experience which is itself valuable. Such an experience will be pleasurable, often in complex ways.

Although critics in ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of a work detect aesthetic values rather than making it the case that the work has certain aesthetic values, the work only has those values because the resultant aesthetic experiences had by such critics are themselves valuable. The aesthetic values of a work are, however, realised by properties of the work which dispose it to cause such valuable aesthetic experiences for humans in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of the work. Those properties are what is aesthetically valuable in the work, and they are objective in the sense that their existence and character is independent of whether they are detected or responded to. This account therefore retains elements of both subjectivist and objectivist

approaches to aesthetic value. It can, I argue, make sense of our conflicting intuitions about the objectivity or subjectivity of aesthetic values in art.

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## Preface

This is a dissertation in Aesthetics, the branch of philosophy concerned with beauty, ugliness and related values such as elegance and garishness. This dissertation can be classed as primarily a work of Meta-Aesthetics: a division of Aesthetics which can be understood by analogy with Ethics. In Ethics, we have the following divisions:

*Applied Ethics* is the philosophy of which actions are morally good, bad, better or worse in particular situations, for example in the ethics of abortion.

*Normative Ethics* is the philosophy of what makes an action morally good, bad, better or worse, for example Consequentialism states that the consequences of actions are what determine their moral value.

*Meta-Ethics* is the philosophy of Ethics, covering issues such as whether moral values exist, whether they are objective, and whether moral judgments are cognitive.

Similarly, in Aesthetics we can identify the following three divisions:

*Applied Aesthetics* is the philosophy of whether and to what extent particular objects are beautiful or ugly (or otherwise aesthetically valuable or disvaluable).

*Normative Aesthetics* can be identified as the philosophy of what makes objects beautiful or ugly.

*Meta-aesthetics* can be seen as the philosophy of Aesthetics, covering issues such as whether aesthetic values exist, whether they are objective, and whether aesthetic judgments are cognitive.

In this dissertation I am interested in what aesthetic values are and to what extent they are objective, and these are issues in Meta-Aesthetics but the answers I defend involve normative aesthetic claims about broadly what makes works of art aesthetically valuable.

The dissertation is structured as follows: there are two introductory chapters; followed by two chapters in which I develop what I am calling Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism; followed by three chapters dealing with some of the main objections and challenges to the view; followed finally by a concluding chapter in which I summarise the claims I have made and the arguments for them.

Chapter 1 introduces concepts of objectivity and Objectivism and the notion of cognitive command as an indication of objectivity and an explanation of convergence in judgment. Chapter 2 introduces concepts of art, aesthetic value, taste, and aesthetic value judgment. I present an apparent paradox involving conflicting intuitions about the objectivity or subjectivity of aesthetic values in art, and I introduce two major historical attempts to address this problem: David Hume's 'standard of taste' and Immanuel Kant's critique of 'judgments of taste'. My own account is a development of certain aspects of each of these theories.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 3 presents Hume's theory of the standard of taste, suggesting two revisions and defending the revised account from the charge that it is viciously circular or unsubstantive. I argue that on the modified Humean account I propose, the aesthetic values of art should be construed as objective dispositions. I defend the revised Humean account from the charge

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<sup>1</sup> HUME, David. Of the standard of taste. In HUME, David, and MILLER, Eugene F. (ed.) *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Liberty Fund Inc., 1985, pp. 226-49.

KANT, Immanuel. *Critique of judgement*. Hafner Press, 1951.

that it cannot account for cases in which something interferes with the manifestation of aesthetic values-as-dispositions.

Chapter 4 further develops the modified Humean account by introducing an element of Subjectivism into the account, but without, I argue, compromising on the claim that aesthetic values in art are objective dispositions. I argue that aesthetic values in art are objective dispositions to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. I defend the claim that it is because of the values of some aesthetic experiences that works disposed to produce them are aesthetically valuable. I propose a Kant-inspired psychology of aesthetic experience and suggest that aesthetic experiences are valuable insofar as they are pleasurable in their involvement of thoughts and imaginings appropriate to the object.

Chapter 5 considers whether aesthetic values in art are relative to a frame of reference, and whether it is possible for critics to faultlessly disagree. I suggest that there is reason to doubt that faultless disagreements occur, but that Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism can explain many cases in which it might seem that they do occur, and one might even interpret such cases as genuinely faultless without this posing a problem for the account. I also consider how best to explain variations in taste along cultural lines, and resist certain relativistic explanations to which my account is opposed.

Chapter 6 considers scepticism about the existence of aesthetic values and the descriptiveness of aesthetic value judgments. I suggest that Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism does not posit strange entities and that, while it seems that aesthetic value judgments are descriptive, if one is inclined to favour a Non-Cognitivist analysis of the semantics of such judgments one need not reject the metaphysical claim that aesthetic values in art are objective.

Chapter 7 responds to the argument that objectivist theories of aesthetic value cannot account for the supposed facts in the epistemology of aesthetic testimony. I argue that aesthetic testimony provides evidence of aesthetic values, and that while the evidence may be weak and difficult to accumulate, this is not a reason to doubt that such values are objective.

Chapter 8 draws conclusions from the previous chapters and summarises their main claims and arguments.

# 1. Objectivity

## 1.0 Introduction

In this first introductory chapter I attempt to identify the conditions for the sort of objectivity which I claim that aesthetic values in art possess. I begin by distinguishing between two kinds of objectivity and clarify that the Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism I defend says that aesthetic values in art are ontologically objective. I then identify a sliding scale between Extreme Subjectivism and Extreme Objectivism, and position my own account between these two extremes. I consider the objectivity of properties of works of art in relation to what I argue is the Response-Dependence of aesthetic value concepts. I explain that Objectivism is seen as necessary but not sufficient for Realism. Finally, I consider some indications of and requirements for ontological objectivity.

I conclude, provisionally, that the aesthetic values of works of art may be to some extent ontologically objective even though aesthetic value concepts are response-dependent. The convergence of aesthetic value judgments, which is plausibly due to the cognitive command aesthetic values exert on our descriptions of them, is an indication of this ontological objectivity.

## 1.1 Epistemic and Ontological Objectivity<sup>2</sup>

Objectivity pertains to objects and subjectivity pertains to subjects. There are at least two kinds of objectivity which are important for the purposes of this dissertation. Firstly, *ontological objectivity* is the ontological status of an entity as independent of our responses

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<sup>2</sup> This distinction can be found in SEARLE, John R. The problem of consciousness. *Consciousness and cognition*, 2:4, 1993: 310-319; pp. 313-4.

to it. For example, the Earth is an object which, long before anyone was there to respond to it, perceive it, form beliefs about it, and so on, had the property of being round. This object continued to have this property even when we misjudged its shape as flat. The properties of objects can therefore be ontologically objective by being *response-independent* in the sense that their presence and character is fixed independently of how we respond to them.

This first kind of objectivity is also exemplified by the property of being (more or less) rectangular in shape, as instantiated by many paintings. Whether the *aesthetic* properties of such paintings are similarly response-independent and ontologically objective is another matter: whether, for example, Picasso's *Guernica* is dynamic irrespective of whether it is judged to be dynamic, or responded to as dynamic.

Examples of properties which lack ontological objectivity might include the following. Suppose one describes the Earth as a frightening place: this is perhaps to attribute a subjective quality to an ontologically objective object; a subject finds the object to be frightening in virtue of responding or being disposed to respond to it with certain subjective states such as feelings of fear. Perhaps an object cannot have an ontologically objective property of being frightening, so the property of being frightening may be an example of a subjective property. *Guernica* itself is, presumably, an ontologically objective object, with certain ontologically objective properties, but its aesthetic property of being dynamic (assuming it has such a property) may be as ontologically objective as a solid object's properties of shape, or as subjective as the Earth's property of being frightening.

Secondly, *epistemic objectivity* can come in the form of abilities exercised, by a subject, in perception and deliberation. Peter Railton distinguishes between three different abilities

which seem to constitute the epistemic objectivity of subjects, and I think these abilities have implications for the ontological objectivity of properties:

1. The ability to reliably detect things.
2. The ability to reason well.
3. The ability to be impartial or disinterested.<sup>3</sup>

A subject exercising one or more of these abilities will, it seems, acquire an epistemic access to that which is ontologically objective. As John Searle explains, there is a sense in which ontologically *subjective* mental states might be understood by means of the epistemic objectivity of scientific enquiry, so it is false that epistemic objectivity implies ontologically objective entities.<sup>4</sup> But where such ontologically objective entities are to be found, the means by which they are found will, it seems, be epistemic objectivity.

To reliably detect things is, at least sometimes, to be aware of that which has a stable, independent character and existence, which different subjects at different times can become aware of. To reason well seems to involve reasoning in a way that will allow one to infer that which is objectively true. Truth, I assume, supervenes on being—the truth value of a proposition cannot change without the objective state of the world changing—so to successfully infer the truth is also to become aware of ontologically objective states of affairs. Finally, to be impartial or disinterested is to avoid the corruption of one's judgment, about that which is ontologically objective, by one's subjective interests and biases. In doing so one can be sensitive to that which is ontologically objective.

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<sup>3</sup> RAILTON, Peter. Aesthetic value, moral value and the ambitions of naturalism. In LEVINSON, Jerrold (ed.) *Aesthetics and ethics: Essays at the intersection*. Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 59-105; pp. 63-5.

<sup>4</sup> SEARLE 1993, pp. 313-4.

Epistemic objectivity can, it seems, involve one or more of these three abilities, which are distinct from, but also related to, the ontological objectivity of the properties of objects, which is the type of objectivity that I will argue that aesthetic values in art can have. I have suggested that ontological objectivity is an independence from responses. The three epistemic abilities I have mentioned seem to imply that ontological objectivity may also involve: being there to be experienced upon being detected; making some propositions true and others false; or constraining thought or discourse in a way that undermines the influence of subjective biases and interests. Ontological objectivity may come in degrees: it could be that some or all of the requirements of ontological objectivity can be met to different extents, or that something can be more or less objective by meeting more or fewer of these requirements. If so, a moderate form of Objectivism may be defended. Before I explain such a moderate view, it will be necessary to clarify what Objectivism is.

### 1.1.1 Objectivity and Objectivism

One of the main claims of this dissertation is that aesthetic values in art are ontologically objective to a large extent: their existence and character is largely independent of our responses or dispositions to respond to them. A secondary claim is that we are capable of attaining at least a modest level of epistemic objectivity that enables us to detect some of these values. The epistemic objectivity of people, or their mental states, is what enables them to detect that which is ontologically objective, namely response-independent properties of objects. I will now demonstrate this with the earlier example of the shape of the planet.

Judgments that the Earth had the property of being flat were, I think we can assume, based on our impression of the environment: the curvature of the Earth is often indiscernible to us

and landscapes free of objects such as hills and mountains tend to appear flat, and so we have sometimes assumed that the Earth is an expanse of flat land plus whatever peaks and valleys we find. This is of course an error because the Earth is a globe, and the error seems to have been due to subjective impressions constrained by limits of sensation and information, and an inadequate sensitivity to the way the world really is.

Science tells us that there is far more to the universe than what we are naturally sensitive to. Richard Dawkins has suggested a useful way of describing this: our senses are attuned to the “Middle World” which is a narrow range in the spectrum between the very small and the very large: we have evolved to perceive medium-sized objects which are relevant to our survival.<sup>5</sup> We are unable with the naked eye to discern atomic, let alone sub-atomic, objects. We may be able to see, unaided, large objects such as stars and planets, but not with the kind of detail or reliability that we have evolved to enjoy in relation to things such as animals, plants and features of the landscape.

We are therefore quite naturally less epistemically objective in relation to facts such as the shape of the Earth than we are to, say, the shape of an apple. But the shape of each of these objects is equally ontologically objective: each object has the shape it does independently of how it seems to us. In the case of the medium-sized object we are relatively good at discerning this shape, whereas in the case of the Earth it was historically easy for us to misjudge its shape, and yet in both cases the shape is there to be experienced, constraining our attempts to describe it, making some propositions true and others false.

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<sup>5</sup> See STONE, M.J. Strange science in the middle World [online], 2006 [viewed 23 August 2014]. Available from: <http://www.mcgill.ca/reporter/39/05/dawkins/>.

Our discourse about the shape of the Earth is constrained by its objective shape because when we talk about the Earth's shape we attempt to describe it. This has the result that the statement 'the Earth is round' is true and the statement 'the Earth is flat' is false, and the propositions these statements express are made true and false respectively by the objective shape of the Earth. Furthermore, the shape of the Earth is there to be experienced, so that when there has been a consensus that the Earth is flat it was nevertheless the case that the Earth was round, and the Earth's actual shape was there ready to be discovered, which of course it was.

This seems to imply a strong form of *Objectivism* about the shape of the Earth: the Earth's shape is independent of how we respond to it, or how we are disposed to respond to it, because even if we had never discovered that the Earth is round or never had the ability to discover this, it nevertheless would be round. This is due to the Earth's shape being ontologically objective, there to be experienced, constraining discourse about it by making some propositions true and others false, independently of what beliefs we form or how we respond. That at least is the picture of ontological objectivity that I have been painting. I will argue that the aesthetic values of art are to a certain extent ontologically objective; in other words I will defend a Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism. To start to piece together this view, I will now define some further crucial terms and present some basic assumptions.

## 1.2 Art Works and their Properties

It is relatively uncontroversial to claim that works of art have objective features: they are objects which instantiate some properties whose nature is determined independently of our responses or dispositions to respond to them. For example, David Bowie's latest album has 14 tracks. If one judges the album to have only 13 tracks, then one's judgment is false and is

the product of error. The error involves failing to correctly discern the number of tracks on the album and being inspired by one's own misapprehension to form a judgment which is false. The number of tracks on the album is there to be experienced and remains 14 regardless of how anyone responds or is disposed to respond.

There might be an element of subjectivity in terms of how we conceive of a 'track', but if we think of the object (for the sake of argument) as a vinyl record with distinct grooves marking the separation between each track, the number of these grooves is, it seems, independent of how we are disposed to respond to grooves in a piece of vinyl. The work is such that when pressed onto vinyl it will normally be divided by distinctive grooves into 14 sections, and if we call these sections the 'tracks', then there are 14 tracks on the album and this is so independently of how many tracks we are inclined to identify the album as having. It therefore seems that a work of art can have objective properties, and although this is not sufficient for the objectivity of aesthetic values in art, it may of course be necessary.

*Aesthetic properties* are a subset of the properties of art works: the properties of an art object which are aesthetically relevant are its aesthetic properties. I will explain what I mean by 'aesthetically relevant', but first let us consider what an 'art work' or a 'work of art' or an 'art object' is (I will use these terms interchangeably). I intend to make as few assumptions about the ontology of art as I can manage for the purposes of this dissertation, but it seems clear that it varies for different mediums. A painting as a work of art seems to consist largely of distributions of paint over a canvas, whereas a piece of music perhaps cannot be identified with any particular artefact, and seems rather to be something like an abstract sequence multiply realised in distinct performances. The ontology of a musical recording, however, such as David Bowie's latest album, can perhaps be different in kind to

that of a musical composition such as a work of Classical music. Arguably the visual art in which an album is packaged is part of the work, perhaps making the album a type of multi-media art work. Such considerations are beyond the scope of this dissertation so I will try to assume nothing more than that there are many different kinds of object which can be described as works of art.

A work of art is an object of some kind or another, and like all objects a work of art has various properties. Some of the properties of an art object are aesthetic properties because they are aesthetically relevant, which means they are properties of the object which, as I will begin to argue in chapter 3, are apt to produce responses in ideal circumstances which are aesthetic experiences. Insofar as such experiences are pleasurable or displeasurable, they bestow upon the work aesthetic values, which the work has largely in virtue of its mundane properties, which are aesthetic properties when they realise aesthetic values in the work according to their relationship to the pleasures and displeasures of the aesthetic experiences of observers in ideal circumstances. In subsequent chapters I will explain and defend this view in detail. Now I move on to some relevant distinctions among the properties of objects including works of art.

### 1.2.1 Objective Primary and Secondary Qualities

This dissertation will defend a conception of aesthetic values in art as dispositions, realised by ontologically objective, descriptive properties of art objects, to produce aesthetic experiences in certain circumstances, experiences which themselves have some positive or negative value. The valence of such experiences, I will argue, renders the dispositional aesthetic values of art works values as opposed to mere dispositions to produce experiences. As I will explain in chapter 4, this latter claim amounts to an element of

Subjectivism in my account. So in defending what I call ‘Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism’ I defend the view that descriptive properties of art objects—which are objective properties in that they can be instantiated regardless of whether we are disposed to experience the object as having them or to ascribe them to the object—can realise the aesthetic values of works of art.

Properties such as shape or mass are often classed as *primary qualities* because the shape or mass of something seems not to depend on how things appear to us. Typically colours are taken to be *secondary qualities* because, for example, a red hat seems to have the property of being red only because it normally looks red to us. There are other ways of drawing the primary-secondary distinction and it is debatable whether the distinction ought to be drawn at all, but what matters here is that properties which are classed as secondary qualities need not also be classed as subjective properties.

Objects can instantiate properties in a subjective sense, such that an object O has property P *because* a subject S in circumstances C ascribes P to O. Such Ps are *subjective properties* and are not ontologically objective. For example, suppose that a rectangular cake is tasty just because I like it and regard it as tasty. Whatever I think about its shape, it is (I assume) objectively rectangular: it has the ontologically objective property of being rectangular, but only the subjective property of being tasty.

Given the definition of ontological objectivity in §1.1 as response-*independence*, it would seem that a secondary quality, in virtue of being response-*dependent*, must be a subjective property. But as John McDowell explains, primary and secondary qualities can both be

objective in the sense that they are there to be experienced.<sup>6</sup> Secondary quality concepts are defined with reference to subjective responses, but this does not imply that the corresponding properties themselves have a nature which is dependent on subjective responses. The nature of properties such as colours can be determined independently of responses, but such that certain responses such as the response of seeing something as red can normally be expected to be caused by the property when it is encountered.

Secondary quality P\* is instantiated by O if and only if an S in C would ascribe P\* to O. Such P\*s are not necessarily subjective properties, as it may be the case that an S in C would ascribe P\* to O because O is objectively P\*; as opposed to O being P\* only because S in C would ascribe P\* to O. Colour may again be an apt example here: an object can perhaps be objectively red even if its redness is a secondary quality. Whereas, perhaps, the object's tastiness may be a matter of personal taste in the sense of being a subjective (as well as secondary) quality of the object.

Here, then, are two orthogonal distinctions between kinds of property: subjective or objective properties; and primary or secondary properties. Primary properties might never be subjective properties (or rather, subjective properties might always be secondary properties), but objective properties may be primary or secondary, as I have explained. I will be defending the view, roughly speaking, that aesthetic properties are objective secondary properties. I will now explain this further.

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<sup>6</sup> MCDOWELL, John Henry. Values and secondary qualities. In SAYRE-MCCORD, Geoffrey (ed.) *Essays on moral realism*. Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 166-80; pp. 168-70.

### 1.3 Aesthetic Objectivism

Regarding the extent to which the aesthetic values of works of art are ontologically objective, there is a spectrum of available positions ranging from *Extreme Objectivism*, the view that they are completely objective, to *Extreme Subjectivism* which is the view that they are not at all objective. Objectivism is the view that properties posited in a given discourse are to some extent ontologically objective, which involves response-independence: their character being determined independently of our responses or dispositions to respond to them. *Extreme Aesthetic Objectivism* would have it that aesthetic values are completely determined by something other than our responses or dispositions to respond to them. In defending a Response-Dependence theory of aesthetic values I will be retreating from this extreme position, but I will also avoid the opposite extreme which states that aesthetic values are entirely constituted by our responses or dispositions to respond to them.

An example of something which is entirely constituted by responses or dispositions to respond, and therefore lacks any ontological objectivity, might be: what it is like to be a bat. The phenomenal consciousness of bats is not, when not experienced, lying dormant ready to be experienced, at least not by us, and it seems to have no existence beyond the experience of it. As Thomas Nagel explains, an objective description of bats cannot include what it is like to be one.<sup>7</sup> This might just be because knowledge of what something is like is procedural and has no propositional content corresponding to a state of affairs that has ontological objectivity. I discuss phenomenal consciousness in relation to the degree to which aesthetic values are objective in §2.3.2.

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<sup>7</sup> NAGEL, Thomas. What is it like to be a bat? *The philosophical review*, 83:4, 1974: 435-450.

An example closer to the topic of this dissertation is that of moral value, for instance the moral rightness of providing asylum to a refugee: perhaps the moral value of this action (for a particular case) is just as objective as the shape of the Earth, or perhaps it is just as subjective as what it is like to be a bat, or perhaps it lies somewhere between these two examples. Values might be 'in the eye of the beholder' or they might be ontologically objective properties, or they might be something in between, such as properties that have some degree of objectivity and some degree of subjectivity. I will argue that the aesthetic values of art works are, as it were, in between the subjective responses of the beholder and the objective features of the work.

### 1.3.1 Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism as Intersubjectivism

In this dissertation I assume that many ordinary descriptive features of objects are ontologically objective, including features of art works such as the shape of a sculpture or the duration of a piece of music. More controversially, I will be arguing that the dispositions of a work to produce aesthetic responses are realised by such natural properties, and that these dispositions are the aesthetic values of a work. The aesthetic values of a work are its propensities in virtue of its natural properties to produce aesthetically relevant responses. So aesthetic values such as dynamism are realised by natural properties such as shapes and colours, and because such natural properties dispose a work to produce aesthetic responses, it is appropriate to ascribe such aesthetic values to the work. There are more and less appropriate ways of responding to and evaluating works of art, due in part to their ontologically objective natural properties, but due in particular to how those properties arouse human sensibilities.

An appropriate name for this view might be ‘Intersubjectivism’, but I have chosen instead to label my view ‘Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism’, to emphasise the role of ontologically objective natural properties of art objects in realising aesthetic values as capacities to please our aesthetic sensibilities.<sup>8</sup> This emphasis is an attempt to ally the view here defended with other members of the broad category of views according to which beauty is not merely ‘a matter of taste’ in the sense that one cannot be mistaken in one’s aesthetic evaluations. Such Objectivisms are right, I argue, to reject this “species of philosophy” as Hume calls it.<sup>9</sup> However, I wish to make some concessions to that species of philosophy without affirming it, such that Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism could, if one prefers, be called ‘Aesthetic Intersubjectivism’. The view may also be considered a form of Response-Dependence, as I will now explain.

### 1.3.2 Response-Dependence

*Response-dependent properties* are secondary qualities, and again they may or may not be subjective properties. But rather than response-dependent properties, I wish now to focus on response-dependent concepts. Some *Response-Dependence* theories identify certain concepts as applicable to an object O depending on how a subject S would respond to O in circumstances C. The relevant circumstances in analysing response-dependent concepts can be abnormal, idealised circumstances. For example, whereas whether an object is red will depend on how we see the object in circumstances which are defined as ‘normal’, whether an object is beautiful might depend on how one would experience it given certain ‘expert’ critical faculties. This is roughly what Hume claims about beauty, and which I defend in

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<sup>8</sup> The term ‘intersubjectivism’ is used in this way, for example, in DORSCH, Fabian. Sentimentalism and the intersubjectivity of aesthetic evaluations. *Dialectica*, 61:3, 2007: 417-446.

<sup>9</sup> HUME 1985, pp. 229-30.

Chapter 3. For now I will further explain the form of Response-Dependence that I will endorse.

Response-Dependence theories of value compare values to secondary qualities such as colour. Response-Dependence is (as far as this dissertation is concerned) a theory about concepts, which states that whether certain concepts pick out one property or another depends on our dispositions to respond to certain properties.<sup>10</sup> In other words, our dispositions to respond to the properties of objects might, for example, determine which properties our colour concepts pick out. Suppose that we have evolved to respond in certain ways to certain reflectance properties, and that this leads us to form a concept of redness which picks out some reflectance properties rather than others. This is very different from our dispositions to see things in colour altering the reality of coloured objects. The properties we pick out when we judge something to be red may be entirely independent of our dispositions to respond in that way, even though the concept deployed in the judgment may be a product of the way we are disposed to respond to the world.

To analyse a concept in terms of responses, we can prioritise certain observational conditions: normal conditions are those in which certain perturbing influences are absent, whereas ideal conditions are those in which all accessible information is available to be accessed.<sup>11</sup> Response-Dependence theses involve biconditionals such as the following:

1. X is red if and only if normal observers in normal conditions would see X as red.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> PETTIT 1991, pp. 608-9.

<sup>11</sup> PETTIT 1991, p. 594.

<sup>12</sup> This view is described by, for example, BOGHOSSIAN, Paul A., and VELLEMAN, J. David. Colour as a secondary quality. *Mind*, 98:389, 1989: 81-103.

Note that 1 does not define 'red' nor tell us anything about what redness looks like. Nevertheless, 1 is not a trivial thesis because it tells us that whether something is red depends on whether it would be experienced as red by normal observers in normal conditions: 1 therefore clarifies to some degree the concept of redness, albeit without supplying a definition of 'red'. As Mark Johnston explains, such a claim is not an attempt to give a reductive theory of redness, but rather an attempt to clarify the conceptual connection between 'red' and the responses of normal observers in normal conditions.<sup>13</sup> The claim is that our responses, or dispositions to respond, shape the concept 'red', but this does not imply that they shape the reality of red objects; rather, the concept 'red' is shaped so as to fall upon some objects and not others, depending on the properties of those objects.

What, then, is the reality of a red object according to a Response-Dependence theory of colour? This is too big a question for me to answer here, but one possibility is that an object which is red is an object with certain reflectance properties, or indeed whatever it is that a physical object must have in order to make it look red to us in daylight, assuming that we are not colour blind, and that all other normal conditions are in place. We call objects that have these physical properties 'red' because they look a certain way to us, but this implies only that the concept 'red' is response-dependent, not that the reflectance properties of red things, which (let us suppose) cause us to see them as red, are determined by our dispositions to respond by seeing them as red.

In the closest possible world in which no human being can distinguish red from green and we call all green objects *and* all red objects 'green', there is no physical difference present in

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<sup>13</sup> JOHNSTON, Mark. III—Dispositional theories of value. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, 1989: 139-174; pp.147-8.

red objects compared to the actual world, and the same physical differences between red and green objects are present in both worlds. And yet, perhaps, colour concepts are response-dependent because colours are secondary qualities. Response-dependence does not seem to imply a strong form of Subjectivism, and is in fact consistent with the ontological objectivity of the properties upon which response-dependent concepts fall. Having introduced the concept of Objectivism for a given domain of enquiry, and its relation to Response-Dependence theories of concepts, I will now clarify how Objectivism relates to what is called 'Realism', and in doing so further clarify the other views I have begun to describe, including my own Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism.

### 1.3.3 Realism and Objectivism

In this dissertation I defend a moderate form of Objectivism, which is to be distinguished from *Realism*. Realism is, briefly, the view that the objects we attempt to describe in a given discourse are real, for example discourse about tables is about real tables, and the judgments we make about tables are attempts to accurately represent those tables. What exactly does it mean for something to be real or for a discourse to be realist? Phillip Pettit suggests that it usually involves three claims:

*Descriptivism*: the discourse attempts to describe the world, positing the existence of certain entities.

*Objectivism*: the character of those entities is fixed independently of our dispositions to respond to them or form beliefs about them.

*Cosmocentrism*: learning about those entities involves discovery rather than invention, and discovery is a matter of contingent success so that mistakes are possible.<sup>14</sup>

Realism about tables, then, would involve the claim that tables are such that our discourse about them is able to satisfy the three constraints listed above.

I will not try to provide a full defence of this conception of Realism, but if it is correct then in defending a claim of Objectivism in the case of discourse about aesthetic values in art, I will go some way towards defending a form of Aesthetic Realism: Realism about aesthetic values, specifically in works of art. The type of objectivity at play in Objectivism as defined by Pettit seems to be ontological objectivity as it is to do with the response-independent character of certain properties. I assume that what is real must be ontologically objective, but my claim that aesthetic values in art are ontologically objective to a certain degree might not by itself establish that the aesthetic values of art are real in the sense that they are part of the fabric of the world or in the sense that our aesthetic discourse involves attempting to describe them. This is implied by theories of Realism such as the above, which regard Objectivism as a necessary but not sufficient condition for Realism.<sup>15</sup>

Pettit provides the above analysis of Realism for the purpose of comparing it to Response-Dependence theories. Given Pettit's and my own definition of Objectivism and ontological objectivity it would seem that Response-Dependence and Objectivism are incompatible, but Pettit denies this, as I will explain shortly. Pettit suggests that Response-Dependence is consistent with Descriptivism and Objectivism, but not Cosmocentrism. Response-

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<sup>14</sup> PETTIT, Philip. Realism and response-dependence. *Mind*, 100:4, 1991: 587-626; pp. 589-90.

<sup>15</sup> See also DEVITT, Michael. *Realism & Truth*. Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd, 1984; pp. 13-14.

Dependence theories, he claims, replace Cosmocentrism with *Anthropocentrism*, which for the aesthetic values of art is the claim that they are values only for Humans.<sup>16</sup> From the perspective of an intelligent non-Human species there might be no aesthetic values or they might be distributed differently because of the major differences in sensibility between species. I will now explain this further.

### 1.3.4 Anthropocentric Objectivism

A *sensibility* is a set of abilities and capacities possessed by a subject, allowing them to respond to the world in certain ways, perform perceptual discriminations, and other behaviours involving sensitivity to the external world. For example, the sensibilities of bats make them sensitive to sound in such a way that they navigate their surroundings by the use of echolocation. Human sensibilities are differently sensitive to the world, so human sensibilities differ significantly from the sensibilities of bats. But sensibilities are not merely perceptual: human beings, at least, are usually emotionally sensitive to certain things, for example events or other people. There are other ways too in which we can be disposed to respond, for example we are disposed to think about the world in certain ways.

Because the Anthropocentrism in Response-Dependence about aesthetic values limits the scope of the view to aesthetic values for human sensibilities, Pettit regards Response-Dependence as a minor retreat from Realism; minor because Objectivism and Descriptivism are consistent with Response-Dependence.<sup>17</sup> The latter are consistent with Response-Dependence because they are claims, respectively, about the descriptivity of certain judgments and the mind-independent existence of certain properties. Response-

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<sup>16</sup> PETTIT 1991, p. 593.

<sup>17</sup> PETTIT 1991, p. 623.

Dependence as a claim about concepts does not come into conflict with any such claims about judgments or properties. Consider the following example.

Suppose that colour concepts are response-dependent, so that the concept 'red' applies to an object if and only if one's responses to that object in normal circumstances would be such that one would deploy that concept and apply it to the object. In other words, the object is 'red' if and only if in normal circumstances it would look red. It is consistent with this response-dependence claim, about the concept 'red', to claim also that one would ascribe that concept to the object *because* the object is (objectively) red.<sup>18</sup> This latter claim is not about the concept 'red' but about the order of determination between the redness of an object and the responses of those who perceive it under certain circumstances. Not only is this latter claim consistent with the claim about the concept 'red' being response-dependent, but in many such cases it seems perverse to affirm the claim about the concept and deny the claim about the property.

Pettit's and Peter Menzies' examples of such perversity include this: Mary caught the flu if and only if she was infected by the flu virus.<sup>19</sup> Assuming that such a claim is true and that Mary has caught the flu, to deny the further claim that Mary caught the flu *because* she was infected would at the very least be wrong given what we know about the relationship between the flu virus and influenza itself. Similarly, we might not be able to maintain certain response-dependence biconditionals without accompanying claims about the objectivity (or lack thereof) of that which is being responded to. Certainly there is nothing in such biconditionals to preclude an order of determination holding between each element of

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<sup>18</sup> Pettit and Peter Menzies defend this consistency here: MENZIES, Peter & PETTIT, Philip. Found: the Missing Explanation. *Analysis*, 53:10, 1993: 100-8.

<sup>19</sup> MENZIES & PETTIT, 1993, p.108.

the biconditional, and if the 'because' relation runs one way, it seems we have a form of Objectivism. I will now explain this in greater detail.

### 1.3.5 The Order of Determination

Pettit's reason for claiming that Objectivism is consistent with Response-Dependence is that Response-Dependence is a theory about concepts, not about the reality of ontologically objective properties of objects. For example, a piece of music may have properties which, due to our propensities to respond to them, fall under an aesthetic value concept such as that of elegance. That concept is, as Pettit would say, "shaped" by our dispositions to respond to certain sounds, such that a piece of music may have the aesthetic value of elegance because we have those dispositions to respond.<sup>20</sup> But that is not to say that the very properties which we are sensitive to in the music, to which we respond in the relevant ways, are shaped by our dispositions to respond.

Richard Joyce suggests that Pettit's assurance that response-dependence does not preclude Objectivism is unlikely to satisfy those who are put off by the Subjectivism involved in the Response-Dependence analysis of concepts.<sup>21</sup> One might hold the intuition (as I do) that the beauty or ugliness of a work of art is objective, and therefore be sceptical that whether something falls under such aesthetic concepts depends in some way on the activity of our minds. But if, as Pettit explains, such concepts can depend in some way on the activity of our minds and yet pick out that which is mind-independent, it is not clear that there is any

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<sup>20</sup> PETTIT 1991, pp. 608-9.

<sup>21</sup> JOYCE, Richard. Moral Anti-Realism [online] in ZALTA, Edward N (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015 [viewed 10 August 2015]. Available from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/moral-anti-realism/>.

rational basis for the habit of moving from scepticism about the mind-dependence of aesthetic properties to scepticism about the response-dependence of aesthetic concepts.

As we have seen already, Response-Dependence theories can be stated as biconditionals as in 1 of §1.3.2. Such claims raise a question as to which side of the biconditional, if either, determines the other. This question, as Crispin Wright explains, marks a distinction between classes of statements about which our judgments formed in the right conditions determine the extension of the truth predicate among them, and classes about which our ideal judgments at most reflect an independently determined extension.<sup>22</sup>

The same type of question arises in what is known as the *Euthyphro Dilemma*: assuming that X is pious if and only if the gods love X, do the gods love X because X is pious, or is X pious because the gods love X?<sup>23</sup> In Wright's terms, the question becomes something like: do the opinions of the gods determine whether it is true that X is pious, or is the truth of X's piety determined independently of the opinions of the gods, the latter being a mere reflection of the fact that X is pious? The distinction may be further summarised as follows: supposing that X is pious if and only if the gods love X, then either the gods are reliable detectors of piety, or piety is constituted by the love of the gods.

On a Response-Dependence account of aesthetic value concepts, values picked out by such concepts may therefore be things that are reliably *detected* in certain conditions, or they may be *constituted* by our responses in such conditions. The first possibility would seem to justify a moderate form of Aesthetic Objectivism, because aesthetic values in art can have their character fixed independently of our dispositions to respond to them, and yet because

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<sup>22</sup> WRIGHT, Crispin. *Truth and Objectivity*. Harvard University Press, 2009; p. 120.

<sup>23</sup> WRIGHT 2009, p. 108.

this character is such that it determines certain responses in certain conditions, there is a sense in which aesthetic values in art are dependent on responses, or rather they are relational with respect to our dispositions to respond.

### 1.3.6 Towards a Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism

In this dissertation I defend a moderate Objectivism about aesthetic values in art and explain how this is consistent with Response-Dependence about aesthetic value concepts. I will more briefly defend Descriptivism for aesthetic value judgments about works of art, but I will argue that Aesthetic Objectivism does not depend on Descriptivism. My focus, then, is on the claim that the aesthetic values of art are largely ontologically objective. Dependence on dispositions to respond might seem to preclude ontological objectivity in the sense of having a character fixed independently of our dispositions to respond, but in this dissertation I argue that this is not the case.

Our dispositions to respond to objects do not determine their properties of shape, and our dispositions to respond to an object's properties of shape do not determine which properties they are, but they might determine our concepts of shape and whether those concepts pick out one property or another.

In chapter 3 I argue, after Hume, that the ontologically objective properties of works of art are naturally fitted to produce particular responses, so that expertise and error are possible in the application of aesthetic value concepts to works of art. Those concepts are dependent on our dispositions to respond to the properties of art works, but the properties they pick out are objective and it is a matter of contingent success whether one detects the aesthetic values of a work of art.

As will become clear in chapter 3, my account employs the notion of an ideal observer. The importance of normal or ideal conditions to a Response-Dependence thesis relates to the idea that some kind of normative notion must be imported in the analysis of a concept in order for that concept to be normative. Johnston argues convincingly that because of the essential connection between value and its commendatory function, there can be no account which reduces value to non-normative concepts.<sup>24</sup> As I explain in chapters 3 and 4, the notion of an ideal aesthetic experiencer, and of aesthetic experiences as valuable in virtue of being pleasurable, can supply this normativity in a Response-Dependence analysis of aesthetic value concepts.

I will argue that our dispositions to respond to the properties of works of art shape concepts such as that of 'beauty' so that they apply to some works and not to others. And yet, our dispositions to respond do not shape the properties of works of art, which retain their ontological objectivity at least to a significant degree. On the above moderately Objectivist reading of Response-dependence, it is implied that the aesthetic values of works of art are themselves dispositions to produce certain experiences in certain conditions. They depend for their manifestation on dispositions on the part of human subjects, and this means they are not full-blown ontologically objective entities. They are, however, dispositions realised by ontologically objective properties which trigger our responses to them.<sup>25</sup>

Specifically, aesthetic values in art are realised by objective properties of works such as distributions of paint in a painting, sequences of sound in a piece of music, shapes carved

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<sup>24</sup> JOHNSTON 1989, pp. 156-7.

<sup>25</sup> I remain neutral as to whether dispositions are identical with that which realises them. A discussion of this is summarised here: CHOI, Sungho and FARA, Michael, Dispositions [online] in ZALTA, Edward N (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014 [viewed 10 August 2015]. Available from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/dispositions/>.

into marble forming a sculpture, literal meanings of sentences in a work of Literature, and so on. These properties can trigger certain responses in virtue of which the objects that instantiate them can be identified as having certain aesthetic values *qua* dispositions to produce valuable aesthetic experiences. Given our propensities to respond to certain salient features of objects, the descriptive properties of objects can realise dispositions to produce aesthetic responses.

Aesthetic values in art, I will argue, are the dispositions of works of art to cause valuable aesthetic experiences for ideal observers in ideal conditions. Aesthetic values *qua* properties of art works apt to produce valuable aesthetic experiences are objective, but *qua* that which is instrumental to the production of valuable aesthetic experiences, the nature of aesthetic values as instruments of aesthetic experience is fixed by human propensities to respond and is therefore not entirely objective. The reality of art objects is largely fixed independently of how we are disposed to respond to them, but aesthetic value concepts are determined by our dispositions to respond, so that the concepts fall upon works which have anthropocentric aesthetic values.

Before moving onto the second introductory chapter, in which I focus on what aesthetic values in art are and how our intuitions about them seem to be in conflict, I will first consider what seems to be an indication of ontological objectivity, which will be especially important in chapter 5 when I consider the possibility of faultless disagreement.

## 1.4 Cognitive Command

According to Objectivism, an objective state of affairs has a nature which is independent of the judgments we make about it, or more generally the responses we have or are disposed to have towards it. According to Descriptivism, our judgments about objective matters are

attempts to accurately reflect reality. Disagreements about the aesthetic values of a work of art are, I will argue, best explained in many cases by deficiencies on the part of at least one participant in the disagreement, and this explanation amounts to an Objectivism about the aesthetic values of art.

Wright uses the term *cognitive command* to refer to the notion that for a domain in which beliefs are representational, differences of opinion are best explained by one or more cognitive shortcomings on the part of at least one subject involved in the disagreement.<sup>26</sup>

He describes cognitive command as follows:

*It is a priori that disagreements, when not attributable to vagueness, are ultimately explicable in terms of cognitive shortcomings; specifically, some material ignorance, material error, or prejudicial assessment.*<sup>27</sup>

Material ignorance and error and prejudicial assessment seem to constitute a failure of epistemic objectivity. As I explained in §1.1, Railton's tripartite conception of epistemic objectivity involves detection, deliberation and disinterestedness. A failure to detect things will of course lead to ignorance, failure to deliberate properly will lead to errors in reasoning, and a lack of disinterestedness will allow one's assessments to be influenced by prejudice.

Another way of describing the notion of cognitive command, then, is as the idea that for a domain in which beliefs are truly representational, disagreements will be explainable by

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<sup>26</sup> WRIGHT, Crispin. Realism: the contemporary debate—w(h)ither now? In HALDANE, John and WRIGHT, Crispin (eds.). *Reality, Representation, and Projection*. Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 63-84.

<sup>27</sup> WRIGHT 1993, p.72.

shortcomings in epistemic objectivity. This is because such beliefs are attempted representations of things which are ontologically objective, and such things constrain our discourse so that errors of description are possible.

Suppose, for example, that judgments in Biology can truly represent the facts of biology. Suppose two biologists disagree about whether the Bonobo is, according to a particular measure, the closest living relative of the Human, which is presumably a matter of fact. Supposing for a moment that my limited knowledge of this subject is not way off the mark, the disagreement might be settled by whether there is, according to a particular measure, a greater ontologically objective similarity between the genomes of Humans and Bonobos than there is between Humans and all other known species. The disagreement will be explainable by some kind of cognitive shortcoming or shortcomings on the part of at least one of the two biologists: one of them might be unaware of crucial data, they may have misunderstood it, or they might assess it in a manner that is biased towards their preconceived opinion.

This is because ontologically objective states of affairs exert a cognitive command on our attempts to represent them, so if two observers with ideal epistemic objectivity were to observe something ontologically objective, they would not disagree about it. Since the similarities between us and other species are not (I assume) merely a matter of opinion or 'taste', at least one of the disputants must have made some kind of mistake.

Suppose now that aesthetic evaluations of works of art can truly represent the objective aesthetic values of works. Aesthetic disagreements would then be explainable by cognitive shortcomings, or in other words, by one or more disputant failing to be perfectly epistemically objective in relation to the aesthetic values of a work. I am currently listening

to *Hex Enduction Hour* by The Fall (an album of songs), for the first time, and I am forming judgments about what I take to be its aesthetic merits and defects. Other listeners are likely to disagree with my evaluations; let's call one of them Smith. If the aesthetic values of this album are ontologically objective then, on the account I have been describing, either I or Smith or both of us is subject to some kind or kinds of cognitive shortcoming which will explain disputed aesthetic judgments about the work.

As I listen to the album, I cannot make out all of the lyrics, and I am therefore failing to detect some features of the work, and I am ignorant of those features. In that respect at least, my epistemic objectivity in relation to this work of art at this moment is imperfect. My access to the work's features might also be inhibited by faulty reasoning, for example those lyrics I can make out I might be misinterpreting. It is also quite possible (perhaps very likely) that my evaluations of the work are influenced by certain biases. Perhaps I am inclined to think that rock music from the city of Manchester is good even when it isn't, due to that city's reputation for highly-acclaimed rock music. In other words, failures of epistemic objectivity in relation to works of art can explain disagreements about ontologically objective aesthetic values of works, supposing that such things exist.

### 1.4.1 Divergence

Divergent responses to ontologically objective matters seem, then, to be best explained by shortcomings in epistemic objectivity. An analogy suggested by Wright illustrates this.<sup>28</sup> Suppose two cameras, designed to produce clear photographs with no distorting special effects, receive the same input but produce dissimilar outputs: they are pointed in the same direction from the same location in the same conditions of lighting, weather and so on, and

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<sup>28</sup> WRIGHT 1993, p.72.

yet the photographs they produce are significantly dissimilar. Given the supposition that external conditions are the same, it seems there must be a fault internal to at least one of the two cameras: for example, the lens may be dirty or the film may be damaged. If the divergent outputs of the two cameras cannot be explained by divergent inputs, then the explanation must be that at least one of the cameras has functioned imperfectly. This is because of what these cameras are: they are machines designed to produce images resembling their inputs. Similarly, our judgments are, at least in some cases, attempts to represent the world, and our disagreements about that which is ontologically objective and that we can truly represent are either due to divergences of input or due to cognitive shortcomings.

The basic idea underlying the notion of cognitive command, then, is that in certain discourses our opinions are not optional: at least one of the two cameras in the above analogy, assuming they are designed to produce a true representation, is malfunctioning due to being faulty. Similarly, there are discourses in which we are commanded by the facts to form particular judgments, and when we do not form those judgments we fail to represent the facts. Disagreements within such a discourse are faulty disagreements. I discuss in chapter 5 whether disagreements about the aesthetic values of works of art are necessarily faulty or whether faultless disagreements can occur.

It seems that a discourse in which the subject matter is ontologically objective, for example the discourse regarding the DNA of Bonobos and Humans, will be a discourse in which we can expect disagreements to be explainable by cognitive shortcomings. This is because ontologically objective entities will be stable inputs due to their independence from our responses to them or dispositions to respond to them. Our responses to them will reflect or

fail to reflect their independent constitution, and when divergent judgments are formed about them this will be due to failures on the part of the judges. The presence of cognitive shortcomings in cases of disagreement within a discourse would seem to be an indication that the subject matter of the discourse is ontologically objective and in virtue of this exerts cognitive command. But the exertion of cognitive command may not be what it is for something to be ontologically objective; it may instead merely be a product of that objectivity and an indication of it.

### 1.4.2 Convergence

Wright develops the notion of cognitive command from the notion that on matters objective we can expect judgments to converge, just as we can expect the outputs of well-functioning cameras to converge when the inputs are the same, given that the function of a camera is to produce an image resembling its input.<sup>29</sup> This notion of convergence again might only be something we would expect from descriptions, in conditions of epistemic objectivity, of that which is ontologically objective, rather than an explanation or an account of that ontological objectivity. Either way, an understanding of convergence is likely to take us towards an understanding of ontological objectivity.

*Convergence* can either be the reduction of disagreement over time or the persistence of agreement over time. That something is ontologically objective does not entail that opinions about it will converge, but convergence of such opinions is perhaps something we should normally expect, at least in conditions of epistemic objectivity. An indication of the truth of some form of Aesthetic Objectivism, then, would be the convergence of aesthetic

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<sup>29</sup> WRIGHT 1993, pp. 69-73.

value judgments best explained by an increasing awareness of the objective aesthetic values of works of art.

Michael Slote makes a plausible speculation that personal aesthetic tastes tend to change in particular directions, for example one who prefers the music of Bruckner to that of Mozart might come to prefer Mozart to Bruckner, whereas it is less likely that the opposite change in taste will take place.<sup>30</sup> This can be explained by further acquaintance with the works of art produced by these composers involving acquaintance with the objective aesthetic values of these works, leading to an increased awareness that, in fact, Mozart was a better composer than Bruckner. I defend in chapter 3 the view that convergences of aesthetic judgment by many critics from different cultures and eras is best explained by the objectivity of aesthetic values, and by masterpieces of art being substantially aesthetically valuable. I also mention in §7.5.4 a study which suggests that aesthetic value judgments do converge upon further acquaintance with works of art.

One might argue that such convergence of aesthetic opinion is due to the influence of critics and teachers, which would explain other phenomena such as cultural trends in aesthetic opinion. But Slote suggests that even if this is the explanation for what convergence there is, this cannot explain why particular aesthetic opinions originally took hold.<sup>31</sup>

One might say that convergence of judgment is adequately explained by our having similar psychologies, without the need to appeal to agreement over that which is objective. Psychology can explain responses, and similarity of psychology can explain similarity of

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<sup>30</sup> SLOTE, Michael A. The rationality of aesthetic value judgments. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68:22, 1971: 821-839.

<sup>31</sup> SLOTE 1971, pp. 825-6.

response, but on the assumption of a mind-independent reality of some kind, this reality supplies an explanation of similarities of psychology and of response. We have adapted to be sensitive in certain ways to the environment so that we may survive, and it is the environment that plausibly explains many convergences of judgment at least indirectly, even if the direct explanation is that we have similar psychologies.

Unidirectional changes of taste, then, might be best explained by objective entities, namely aesthetic values; unidirectional changes of taste are, as it were, what Aesthetic Objectivism might look like, but it is an empirical question whether changes in taste are unidirectional. In this dissertation I will not presume to have the scientific skills or experience required to properly assess such empirical claims, although I will refer to the occasional empirical study that sheds a little light on the empirical premises involved in the philosophical subject matter of the dissertation.

For now all I am suggesting is that convergence *would be* evidence of cognitive command being exerted by the aesthetic values of works of art due to those values having ontological objectivity. What, if anything, can this tell us about what it is for such values to be ontologically objective? It seems to me that aesthetic value judgments would be likely to converge in the right conditions *because* aesthetic values in art are objective, and not that such convergence constitutes their objectivity. Perhaps the objectivity of aesthetic values is constituted by their commanding that we form certain cognitions rather than others, or perhaps ontological objectivity is something else which underlies cognitive command and convergence: ontological objectivity seems to also involve a property's being there to be experienced, independently of how we are disposed to experience it, and determining that

we experience it in certain ways. I will return to these issues in relation to the aesthetic values of art in chapter 3.

## 1.5 Conclusions

In this first introductory chapter I have identified the relevant type of objectivity for the purpose of defending a Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism about the aesthetic values of art. I have explained that aesthetic values in art may be to a certain extent ontologically objective: that is, they may be partly constituted by properties which are fixed independently of our dispositions to respond to them. And yet, I will argue, aesthetic value concepts are response-dependent in the sense that a work of art has certain aesthetic values and falls under such concepts if and only if it has the capacity to produce certain responses in certain conditions. I will fill out the details of these claims in due course. I have begun to argue that Response-Dependence about the aesthetic values of art is consistent with a Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism. The order of determination can be such that aesthetic values determine the responses in virtue of which they are aesthetic values, and this makes it possible for us to make errors about the aesthetic values of art works, and makes it likely that in the right circumstances our aesthetic evaluations will converge.

Having introduced a relevant concept of objectivity and Objectivism, in the next introductory chapter I introduce concepts of aesthetic value in art, the nature of judgments about such values, and the conflicting intuitions that seem to arise regarding the objectivity or subjectivity of aesthetic values. After this the remainder of the dissertation is devoted to defending, in detail, a Response-Dependence account of aesthetic values in art as a form of Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism.

## 2. Aesthetic Values in Art

### 2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the notion of aesthetic values in art. I begin by considering which objects should be classed as works of art. I then distinguish between thick and thin value concepts. I then introduce an apparent paradox in aesthetics involving the appearance that ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ and the appearance that we can be mistaken about whether something is beautiful. I suggest that Hume moves towards the right sort of solution to this apparent paradox, according to which aesthetic values are objective capacities to produce certain subjective experiences.<sup>32</sup> I then describe how Kant characterises aesthetic judgments and aesthetic experiences in his attempt to address the paradox, and suggest that elements of this view are consistent with a Hume-inspired ideal observer theory of aesthetic values in art, as I will explain in further detail in subsequent chapters.

### 2.1 Art

I assume in this dissertation that art is, at least partly and in many cases, an aesthetic practice: the artist attempts to produce, whether by creation or appropriation or some other means, an object which is aesthetically valuable. Some aestheticians claim that there are non-aesthetic works of art: works which are not intended to be aesthetically valuable.

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<sup>32</sup> HUME 1985.

Duchamp's 'readymades' are one example that has been suggested.<sup>33</sup> But I focus in this dissertation on works of art that are intended to be aesthetically valuable, or are part of a tradition of producing art that is supposed to be aesthetically valuable. I suspect that a successful aesthetic analysis of works such as Duchamp's can be provided but I will not offer it here.

I will not, in this dissertation, try to provide a water-tight definition of 'art'. I should, however, clarify the scope of my defence of a Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism about the aesthetic values of art. My account will imply that something that we value in many works of art is their capacity to provide valuable aesthetic experiences, such capacity being the result of the artist's intentions or actions. A related claim is that the *function* of art is to provide valuable aesthetic experiences, but I will not be committed to a simple Functionalism about art: something may be work of art because of how it relates to art history, for instance, which might need to be explained in non-functional terms. In my defence of the moderate objectivity of the aesthetic values of art, not much will hang on what the precise necessary or sufficient conditions are for something to be a work of art. Partly this is because, although I focus on art, my account of aesthetic values may or may not apply equally well to natural objects which are not works of art.

The distinction between the aesthetics of art and of nature may be problematic since there are objects which do not slide comfortably into either category. A garden, for example, is not sculpted with the precision with which one can sculpt a piece of marble, but nor does a garden develop entirely naturally insofar as the locations of different plants and other

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<sup>33</sup> STECKER, Robert. Definition of Art. In LEVINSON, Jerrold (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of aesthetics*. Oxford University Press, 2003: 136-154; p. 143.

components is determined by the gardener. It seems a sculpture is a work of art, and a flower is not, whereas a garden is like a sculpture in some respects but is comprised of objects like flowers whose beauty seems to occur naturally such that it is aesthetic but not artistic. That at least is how it seems to me, and I am therefore unsure whether a garden is a work of art. Mary Mothersill suggests other problem cases: "A coiffure, wind chimes, a letter of condolence..."<sup>34</sup>

This may be a problem for my attempt to confine this dissertation to claims about art, but I think it is safe to assume that within the set of objects that might bear aesthetic values, there is at least a vague subset which contains works of art. My claims about the objectivity of aesthetic values are about objects determinately within this subset, but these claims may or may not be applicable to some or all objects in the larger set. For example, my claims about the aesthetic values of works of music may or may not be true of the aesthetic values of birdsong; I neither defend nor deny the truth of such claims for objects that I do not consider to be works of art.

### 2.1.1 Art and Nature

I acknowledge, then, that there are many things other than works of art to which we ascribe predicates of aesthetic value such as 'beautiful' or 'ugly', but I do not attempt here to defend the objectivity of aesthetic values outside art. I am hesitant to simply assume that my claims about art extend to other sorts of aesthetic object, because my intuitions and perhaps folk intuitions tend to vary for different domains. For example, it seems to me that

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<sup>34</sup> MOTHERSILL, Mary. *Beauty and the Critic's Judgment: Remapping Aesthetics*. In KIVY, Peter (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004, pp. 152-166; p. 158.

we can faultlessly disagree about the visual beauty of people in a way that we cannot regarding the beauty of art.

When two people disagree about whether a human person is beautiful, I am inclined to assume (pending further scientific knowledge on my part) that they are quite naturally disposed to find different people attractive due in part to their genetic predispositions. For example, heterosexual men will perhaps be more inclined to judge women rather than men to be 'beautiful' in a narrow, sexual sense, due to sexual orientation which (I assume) is largely biologically determined. Furthermore, it seems that our genes may determine more fine-grained preferences, for particular individuals with whom one would be more likely to produce healthy offspring. It seems unlikely that judgments about the beauty of art are quite so tied to biological individuation, since it is unclear what evolutionary benefit this would carry.

My intuition here is that disagreements about the sensual beauty of human persons are more dependent on individual genetic differences than disagreements about the aesthetic values of works of art. I am of course speculating on empirical matters which speculation cannot settle, but suffice it to say that it is unclear to me that the aesthetic values of natural objects such as human bodies is objective or absolute to the same degree as the aesthetic values of works of art. My guess is that aesthetic values in art are objective in a way that sexual attractiveness is not, but it could be that the connection to natural, genetic preferences renders sensual beauty more objective in some sense than the aesthetic values of art. But I will set aside the aesthetics of non-art objects as something to be examined elsewhere. Having limited my enquiry to the artistic, I will now say a little about what I take to be the limits of the artistic.

To the extent that the art-nature dichotomy makes sense at all, it seems to relate to the fact that art objects are designed to be experienced, whereas natural objects are not designed and if they have a primary function it is not necessarily (if ever) to be experienced by humans. I assume that works in classical styles and mediums such as literature, musical composition, painting and sculpture are works of art, alongside works in modern styles and mediums such as video games, performances of stand-up comedy and feature films. I will not discuss controversies regarding the inclusion of some of these kinds in any great detail because I do not believe that my claims depend on settling such controversies.

## 2.2 Aesthetic Values in Art

Art objects that are intended to be aesthetically valuable may come in many varieties, for example carved pieces of marble, distributions of paint on a canvas, sequences of words to be interpreted and performed, sequences of notes to be performed, strings of digital code, reels of film, and so on. As I explained in §1.2, the ontology of art varies for different kinds of art. I will not go beyond that rough picture of the ontology of art of different kinds; for present purposes I need only make it clear that when I speak of a work of art as an object I may refer to a concrete artefact, an abstract sequence, or any number of other sorts of object that artists provide for our aesthetic appreciation. I will now look at the question of what the aesthetic values of such things might be.

The paradigm aesthetic value in art and elsewhere is beauty, and perhaps also its opposite: ugliness. But there are many other aesthetic value predicates that we deploy in our evaluations of works of art, and insofar as such evaluations are accurate there are aesthetic values of art corresponding to these predicates. Aesthetic value predicates such as 'beautiful', 'ugly', 'elegant' and 'garish' can be divided into at least two categories, as used

for moral value predicates such as ‘cruel’ and ‘wrong’. Bernard Williams distinguishes between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ value predicates in *Ethics*. *Thick* value predicates contain both a descriptive and an evaluative element, whereas *thin* value predicates are purely evaluative.<sup>35</sup>

Consider the act of giving to charity. Suppose that this is a morally good act and also a conscientious act. ‘Conscientiousness’ might be understood as follows: a conscientious act is motivated by a sensitivity to the feelings of others (descriptive component of thick concept) in a way that is morally good (evaluative component). ‘Morally good’ on the other hand is a pure evaluative concept and implies no particular descriptive features of an act, and merely evaluates the act positively. The descriptive and evaluative aspects of thick concepts are separable, so for instance, one might act in a way that is sensitive to the feelings of others but in a way that is morally bad (we might call this ‘cruelty’ or ‘sadism’ perhaps).

Supposing that a conscientious act such as giving to charity has these two components—it falls under a particular non-evaluative description and is also positively morally evaluable—this raises the question of what the connection is, if there is a connection, between these two components. It seems somewhat plausible that such an act fits some non-evaluative description, and in virtue of fitting this description it is in this respect a morally good act. But the is-ought gap between its fitting this description and its being good might be difficult to bridge.

Alternatively, it may be that the act is first of all (at least partially) a morally good act, but this is to be understood in terms of certain of its descriptive features. This is how Stephan Burton suggests that thick concepts function: they evaluate something on the basis of

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<sup>35</sup> WILLIAMS, Bernard. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Taylor & Francis, 2011; p.144.

certain descriptive features of it.<sup>36</sup> For example, giving to charity might be good partly because it involves a sensitivity to the feelings of others and a concern for their welfare to be protected or improved. In which case it might be appropriately called a conscientious act. This is as opposed to the notion that the act is conscientious because the sensitivity involved in it is good.

In other words, suppose that an act A falls under thick moral concept T, the latter which contains two elements: TD (a descriptive component) and TE (an evaluative component). A is T and is therefore both TD and TE. One view would be that A is T because in virtue of being TD it is also TE. For example, saving a baby from a fire may be courageous in the sense that it involves putting oneself at great personal risk in order to protect another, where this serves as a morally good-making feature of the act.

But the non-evaluative descriptive feature of the act is not sufficient to warrant a positive evaluation of the act—an A can be TD without being TE—and so it seems that it would be false to claim that an act is conscientious if and only if it falls under a relevant TD and is therefore in that respect good; it might well fall under the very same TD and not be in that respect good. Better instead, as Burton explains, to say that A is T because it is TE in a particular way identified by TD.<sup>37</sup>

On this view, saving a baby from a fire may be courageous in the sense that it is morally good (*ceteris paribus*) partly in virtue of falling under a particular instance of the description type 'involves putting oneself at great personal risk in order to protect another'. That is not to say that falling under such a description necessarily makes an act in that respect good;

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<sup>36</sup> BURTON, Stephan L. 'Thick' concepts revised. *Analysis*, 52:1, 1992: 28-32.

<sup>37</sup> BURTON 1992, p. 31.

rather, it is to say that in this case falling under the description makes the act in that respect good. Having clarified the thick-thin distinction I will now apply it to aesthetic values.

### 2.2.1 Thick and Thin Aesthetic Values

In aesthetics, 'beautiful' is the paradigm positive aesthetic value predicate because it is wholly evaluative, unlike for example the term 'garish' which has an evaluative and a descriptive component. 'Garish' can mean 'excessively bright', which includes the non-evaluative description 'bright' combined with the evaluative qualification 'excessively'.

Instead of describing a bright yellow shirt as 'garish' one could say it is 'bright and ugly' or perhaps 'ugly because it is so bright', and one would convey the same information as if one had called the shirt 'garish'. Calling a shirt 'beautiful' does not imply any particular description of the shirt; it could be bright, dark, striped, plain, or fall under any description that would be consistent with its being positively aesthetically valuable. Calling the shirt 'beautiful' specifies no such description, and merely evaluates the shirt aesthetically. A description will apply, however: it seems there will be something about the shirt in virtue of which it is beautiful, assuming that it is.

I will now explore this further and suggest that the thick and thin dichotomy may help to explain what it is for something to be aesthetically valuable. A work of art which falls under the thin value predicate 'beautiful' will, it seems, also fall under certain thick value predicates, and will be beautiful in virtue of being, for example, elegant, balanced, vibrant or iconic. The thin value of beauty seems to supervene on such thick values, or at least on the properties of the object that are described by the descriptive component of thin value predicates.

In other words, it seems there can be no change to an object's thin aesthetic values without some change to the properties in virtue of which the object falls under certain thick aesthetic value concepts. For example, were an ugly shirt to be made more or less ugly, this would have to entail some alteration being made to the shirt such that different descriptions would apply to it, including those descriptions that form part of the thick aesthetic value concepts applicable to the shirt.

For instance the shirt might be made less ugly by being dyed a different colour, and this might amount to taking away the shirt's garishness such that it becomes less ugly. A supervenience relation therefore seems to hold between the thin value concepts that apply to an object and the properties of an object picked out by the thick value concepts. That is, there can be no change to the object's thin values without a change to its properties, so to make the shirt less ugly something about the shirt's array of properties must be changed.

The question of whether the beauty of works of art is objective may therefore become a question of whether the properties, in virtue of which a work has the aesthetic values it has, are themselves objective. Alternatively, aesthetic values in art might be best understood in terms of aesthetic experiences rather than aesthetic properties: perhaps a work is beautiful if and only if it can be the object of the right sorts of aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic experiences might just be the experiences of aesthetic properties; alternatively, aesthetic properties might just be whatever properties cause aesthetic experiences. There is a decision to be made about which of these two things, if either, is basic in the constitution of aesthetic values. This will be the subject of chapter 4, but in the meantime I will not conceal my commitment to the view that the values of aesthetic experiences are prior to those of a work's properties, in the constitution of the work's aesthetic values.

Having introduced aesthetic value concepts and begun to consider the relation between descriptive features of objects and the evaluative concepts they fall under and how that may relate to the problem that this dissertation is an attempt to solve, I will now articulate the latter problem in further detail.

### 2.3 The Paradox of Taste

In the remainder of this dissertation I will attempt to address an apparent paradox in Aesthetics, which is that common sense would have it that beauty and ugliness and other aesthetic values are 'in the eye of the beholder', and yet common practice seems to imply that we can be mistaken in ascribing aesthetic values to a work of art. It can seem on the one hand that if one experiences something as beautiful, then in some sense it is beautiful. And yet, it can also seem that some ascriptions of beauty are mistaken even when they are based on experiences as of beauty.

Hume identifies two opposing and widely held views about taste in art. The first view is that sentiment is at the core of taste, and so, since sentiments are non-representational, there can be no standard of correctness in matters of taste because one non-representational state cannot be more correct than another:

*There is a species of philosophy, which ...represents the impossibility of ever attaining any standard of taste. The difference, it is said, is very wide between judgment and sentiment. All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right;*

*because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard.*<sup>38</sup>

The second view that Hume identifies is the thought that some works of art or artists are obviously better than others. He claims that in at least some cases the appearance is not only that a work is aesthetically valuable, but that compared to certain other works the difference in value is analogous to the difference in size between a mountain and a molehill.<sup>39</sup> It seems that Hume is right to assume that some art works are much better than others, for example Shakespeare wrote sonnets which are much better than the following haiku:

*This is a poem*

*Which I am writing merely*

*For illustration.*

The general view that some works of art are universally better than others is widespread; as Railton observes:

*Bookstores bulge with guides, and newspapers and journals do a steady business in reviews. We readily pay for reliable restaurant ratings, travel great distances to view recognised natural wonders, and freely swap judgments on music or movies.*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> HUME 1985, pp. 229-30.

<sup>39</sup> HUME 1985, pp. 230-1.

<sup>40</sup> RAILTON 2001, p. 72.

These practices suggest that many people believe that there is something of universal value that is present in certain works of art so that critics are justified in making recommendations to people in general regarding what is universally calculated to please.

Hume tries to find a principle that will settle aesthetic disputes and a theory of aesthetic values to replace the common sense view that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, which fails to justify the similarly common practices of aesthetic disagreement, argumentation and persuasion, and the intuition that some works of art are simply better than others. Conceding that sentiment is at the core of taste and is non-representational, Hume tries to show that sentiments of beauty can nevertheless be objectively valid. He argues that sentiments, unlike determinations of the understanding, have reference to nothing beyond themselves, and yet that we can “mingle some light of the understanding with the feelings of sentiment.”<sup>41</sup>

One belief can be more correct than another in terms of accurately representing the facts, but sentiments perhaps represent nothing at all and therefore cannot be more or less successful at doing so. It is commonly concluded from this that, assuming as Hume does that the mental states involved in aesthetic appreciation are sentiments, the aesthetic values of art are ‘in the eye of the beholder’.

Wholly sentimental responses to art works are by definition non-descriptive and so are not apt for accuracy, yet they may function as reliable indications of universal aesthetic capacities to produce worthwhile aesthetic experiences. Although Hume thinks that beauty is a quality of the sentiment rather than the object, he insists that certain qualities in objects are naturally fitted to produce particular sentiments:

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<sup>41</sup> HUME 1985.

*A clear and distinct sentiment attends [an experienced critic] through the whole survey of the objects; and he discerns that very degree and kind of approbation or displeasure, which each part is naturally fitted to produce.*<sup>42</sup>

Hume argues that the sentiments of such experienced critics reliably correspond to a work's aesthetic values.

Another way of describing the paradox is that it seems our attributions of aesthetic values to works of art are based on our subjective experiences, and yet when we make such attributions we seem to be aspiring to describe something about the work about which it is possible to be mistaken: in other words, something objective. This is how Elisabeth Schellekens puts it:

*What comes to be known as the 'paradox of taste' thus centres around the following problem: how are we to reconcile the subjective pleasure that is undeniably part of aesthetic experience with the objective aspirations of the very judgements resulting from that pleasure? How are we to account for, let alone overcome, this seemingly irreconcilable duality between the coincident subjectivity and objectivity of taste? The question arises as judgements of aesthetic taste do not seem to be like most judgements of taste in that they seem to amount to more than mere reports of subjective mental states. Yet at the same time, they cannot be said to pick out an objective property, at least as such things are conceived traditionally.*<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> HUME 1985, p. 237.

<sup>43</sup> SCHELLEKENS, Elisabeth. Taste and Objectivity: The Emergence of the Concept of the Aesthetic. *Philosophy Compass*, 4:5, 2009: 734-743; p. 738.

These conflicting intuitions may be the result of the objectivity of the properties of the objects that we call 'works of art' in conjunction with the subjective qualities of the aesthetic experiences we have of those objects, and which are normally the basis for our aesthetic value judgments. In other words, the method by which we become aware of an object's aesthetic values, which perhaps supervene on some of the object's properties, may be that we infer from the qualities of our subjective experiences that the objects which cause them have certain values. This method may be unusually indirect as compared to ordinary perception, as will become clearer when I begin to discuss the nature of aesthetic experience in §2.5. Although we can perhaps fail by this method to correctly attribute values to an object, the subjectivity of the experiences on the basis of which we attribute aesthetic values to an object may create the false impression that we are projecting these values onto the object rather than being sensitive to their presence in the object.

### 2.3.1 Sketching a Solution

Common sense would have it, then, that beauty is 'subjective' and yet that errors of aesthetic judgment are possible due to some works of art being better than others, either overall or in certain respects. How can we make sense of, or correct, this picture? It is not immediately clear how a work of art can be objectively more beautiful than another, if beauty is a subjective quality of experience, or something that we ascribe to objects on the basis of subjective experience. However, the objective features of the objects we call 'works of art' can, as with any object of experience, determine the subjective experiences we have of them.

Works of art have objective features such as shapes, colours, and structures, and these can be described objectively. This is not sufficient for the objectivity of aesthetic properties or

values: as I explained in §2.2.1, to fall under some aesthetic value concept it is necessary but not sufficient to fall under some non-evaluative description(s) such as a description of its shapes, colours or structure. Furthermore, describing a work as possessing such descriptive features will not capture what it is like ‘in the eye of the beholder’; what it is like to experience the work from a point of view. But insofar as the non-evaluative properties of objects are capable of producing similar subjective experiences among human observers, just as perhaps the colours of objects can produce similar colour experiences, describing such objective properties as partially constituting a work's beauty (or other aesthetic values) does not conflict with the idea that beauty is in some sense a quality of subjective experience. That is, beauty and other aesthetic values in art, as I argue in chapter 4, are instrumental values to produce valuable aesthetic experiences, so the source of value for works of art is in the values of certain kinds of subjective experience.

The value of a sharp knife may be instrumental, for example a cheese knife may be good because it is good to eat cheese and a cheese knife can help one do this. Nevertheless, the cheese knife is a good cheese knife because it has certain physical properties such as sharpness. The aesthetic values of art, as I will argue, are instrumental values that derive from the values of aesthetic experiences, and at the same time supervene on ontologically objective properties of art objects, just as the value of the cheese knife derives from the value of eating cheese, and supervenes on properties of the knife.

### 2.3.2 Subjectivity

Judgments about the aesthetic values of a work of art are normally based on one's subjective experiences of the work, and yet they often imply universal validity: when one judges a work as being aesthetically valuable, one often implies that the work possesses

aesthetic values which others may also experience in the work (I explain this in §2.4.1). But this objective assessment of the work cannot capture the subjective character of experiences of the work, even though the assessment is normally based on one's subjective experiences of the work.

Aesthetic experiences of works of art are subjective in at least the sense that there is something that it is like to have them. Nagel explains this 'something that it is like' by means of the example (which I have already alluded to) of what it is like to be a bat as something that cannot be experienced by humans who lack the ability to perceive the world via echolocation.<sup>44</sup> Incidentally, it is not clear that we do lack this ability, but Nagel's point does not depend on that assumption: the thought is that different species do of course perceive the world differently due to differences in sensory and cognitive apparatus, and this means that other beings have subjective, phenomenal experiences that we have no access to, certainly not from a third person point of view.<sup>45</sup>

This phenomenal aspect of consciousness is termed 'qualia' and is the distinguishing feature of phenomenal consciousness, and so it is a feature of the phenomenally conscious aesthetic experience of a work of art. Nagel argues that a reductive analysis of the mind which is compatible with the absence of qualia cannot account for the presence of qualia, and since an objective description of bats cannot capture the subjective character of what it is like to be a bat, it cannot account for bat qualia and cannot therefore be a complete

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<sup>44</sup> NAGEL 1974.

<sup>45</sup> See STROFFREGEN, Thomas A. and PITTENGER, John B. Human echolocation as a basic form of perception and action. *Ecological psychology*, 7:3, 1995: 181-216.

description of the nature of bats.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, aesthetic experiences have an irreducible subjective character just because they are phenomenally conscious experiences.

Just as what it is like to be a bat is something accessible only to a creature that perceives via echolocation, what it is like for one to aesthetically experience an art work might seem to be something personal which is not accessible from other points of view. For example, one's aesthetic experience of a tale of romance might involve one's idiosyncratic emotional capacities, or perhaps personal values or associations, although such things might arguably be a distraction from the work.

If we judge a work to be beautiful on the basis of experiencing it in a certain way, and we are prone to find the way we experience art to be quite personal, we might form the view that the work is only beautiful in a subjective sense, and that there is nothing ontologically objective that might justify another subject experiencing the work in one way rather than another. This may, however, be a misapprehension due to the subjectivity of aesthetic experience, and consistent with the objectivity of aesthetic values in art.

One might be inclined to say that we ought not to take our subjective experiences of works of art to generalise and that no way of experiencing a work is more appropriate than another. On the other hand, I am inclined to maintain that some aesthetic experiences of a work give one better access to the objective aesthetic capacities of a work than others, but it is unclear how this can be so given the subjectivity of aesthetic experience: how can we make an objective assessment of a work's aesthetic values if aesthetic value judgments are based on subjective experiences?

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<sup>46</sup> NAGEL 1974, pp. 436-7.

Perhaps the answer is simple: some subjective impressions of the aesthetic values of works of art are just mistaken, and so rather than basing aesthetic value judgments on one's subjective experiences of a work, one should focus only on describing the objective aesthetic properties of the work. Suppose that Smith and Jones respond very differently to the same film: Smith laughs at the scenes that make Jones cry, and cries at the scenes that make Jones laugh; their aesthetic experiences are largely dissimilar. On the basis of their own responses to the film, Smith and Jones will likely form contrary aesthetic value judgments about it. Supposing that Smith and Jones attempt to make universally valid aesthetic value judgments about the film which cannot both be true, at least one of these judgments will be mistaken. If these judgments are based on each subject's experiences of the film then it seems that at least one of the two subjects responded incorrectly to the film. But this seems to go against the common sense platitude that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder': the subjective, personal nature of aesthetic experience makes it somewhat unpalatable to suggest that one's aesthetic experience of a work may be deficient. In this dissertation I argue that aesthetic experiences of works of art can be deficient and that this explains many cases in which subjects respond differently and form different value judgments about the same work of art. And yet, I acknowledge a grain of truth in the common sense platitude, which is roughly that aesthetic values lie, as it were, in the relations between the 'eye of the beholder' and the objective properties of the art work. I will now consider the judgments involved in the paradox of taste, which as I have mentioned seem to imply a universal validity which can seem at odds with the subjectivity of aesthetic experience.

## 2.4 Aesthetic Judgments

Aesthetic values are the subject of *aesthetic value judgments*, and an analysis of aesthetic value judgments may aid the analysis of aesthetic values. The practice of evaluating a work of art aesthetically involves forming judgments on the basis of experiences of the work in question. In theory this might involve forming judgments on the basis of somebody else's experience of the work in question, without experiencing it for oneself. In chapter 7 I argue that it is theoretically possible to learn about a work's aesthetic values in this way. Usually, however, one will make aesthetic value judgments on the basis of one's own experiences of a work.

Hume, as I have described, suggests that our aesthetic value judgments about works of art are based on sentimental responses to the works. Kant gives an account of aesthetic values similar to Hume's in some ways, in which he claims that aesthetic value judgments are based on cognitive and imaginative experiences.<sup>47</sup> On both views aesthetic value judgments are taken to be based on some kind of experience which we may identify as *aesthetic experience*.

Both views are attempts to reconcile the two species of common sense according to which, on the one hand, beauty is merely a subjective feeling that we can have, and on the other hand, something can be beautiful for people in general even if they do not find it to be so.<sup>48</sup> In other words, both Hume and Kant attempt to address the paradox of taste which I described in §2.3.

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<sup>47</sup> KANT 1951, p.51 (§9).

<sup>48</sup> HUME 1985, p. 229-31.

The location of aesthetic value judgments within Kant's taxonomy of judgments is a useful starting point for an investigation into aesthetic value judgments and their objects. Kant claims that what is distinctive about aesthetic value judgments, or what he calls 'judgments of taste', is the following four features: they are based on feelings; they are disinterested; they make a claim to universal validity; and they are non-conceptual. I will now explain each of these features in turn to demonstrate how an understanding of aesthetic value judgments can aid the analysis of aesthetic values. Following this, I will describe the other features of

Judgments that...	...are based on disinterested feelings	...are based on non-disinterested feelings	...are not based on feelings
...make a claim to universal validity based on concepts		<i>Moral Judgments</i>	<i>Empirical Judgments and Logical Judgments (both of which are Cognitive Judgments)</i>
...make a claim to universal validity not based on concepts	<i>Aesthetic Value Judgments (or 'Judgments of Taste')</i>		
...make no claim to universal validity		<i>Judgments of Agreeableness</i>	

FIGURE 1: KANT'S TAXONOMY OF JUDGMENTS

Kant's influential account of aesthetic value. Much of what Kant says about aesthetic judgments and experiences is plausible and can be incorporated into the Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism that I defend.

In Kant's terminology, 'judgments of taste' are just one type of 'aesthetic judgment', a category which also includes judgments of 'the sublime', which I will not be discussing. I will continue to use the phrase 'aesthetic value judgment' to refer to what Kant calls a 'judgment of taste'. Figure 1 summarises what Kant understands these judgments to involve compared to other types of judgment. I will now explain this information.

Aesthetic value judgments are, according to Kant, based on subjective *feelings* of pleasure or displeasure.<sup>49</sup> This is something that he claims they share in common with moral judgments: one evaluates an action morally according to one's feelings of approval or disapproval in response to it.<sup>50</sup> In fact it seems that one can evaluate an act morally by applying moral principles, without experiencing any particular feelings, but at least sometimes one does base one's moral judgment on feelings, for example when one judges something to be wrong because one is disgusted by it.

### 2.4.1 Aesthetic Value Judgments

Unlike moral judgments and judgments about what one finds agreeable, Kant claims that aesthetic value judgments are based on *disinterested* feelings.<sup>51</sup> This means that the feelings are independent of personal desires, and they are impartial responses to objects. Compare judgments of agreeableness, such as the judgment that 'bouncy castles are fun':

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<sup>49</sup> KANT 1951, p. 37 (§1).

<sup>50</sup> KANT 1951, p. 44 (§5).

<sup>51</sup> KANT 1951, pp. 38-43 (§§2-4).

this judgment is likely to be tied up with a desire to bounce up and down on an inflatable castle, and therefore is not a judgment that will be made by somebody who lacks this desire, or who has certain other desires or interests.

So far I have mentioned aesthetic value judgments, moral judgments and judgments of agreeableness, all of which Kant claims are based on feelings: one judges that something is thus and so based on how that thing makes one feel. Aesthetic value judgments can be distinguished from the other two types of judgment because the feelings they are based on are supposed to be disinterested. Judgments of agreeableness can be distinguished from the other two because they make no claim to *universal validity*: when one judges something to be agreeable, one does not call upon others to agree. But when one ascribes moral or aesthetic values to something, one does, Kant claims, call upon others to ascribe the same values to the same objects.<sup>52</sup>

For example, in saying 'it is wrong to set fire to cats for fun' one implies that people other than oneself should believe this or at least act according to it by refraining from setting fire to cats for fun. Similarly, Kant says that when one claims that 'this object is beautiful' one implies that others ought to find the object beautiful. Aesthetic and moral judgments therefore share a normativity that is lacking in judgments of agreeableness. Such universal validity is also implied by judgments made in the sciences, for example geometrical judgments: if one judges that something has a particular geometry, one implies that others ought to ascribe the very same geometry to the same object, and that if they fail to do so they are in a state of ignorance.

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<sup>52</sup> KANT 1951, pp. 46-8 (§7).

What separates judgments of taste from cognitive and moral judgments (apart from disinterested feelings), according to Kant, is that the universal validity of judgments of taste is *non-conceptual*.<sup>53</sup> This means that they are not judgments about what kind of thing something is. Claiming that X is beautiful does not involve identifying it as, for example, a rose, and then judging it to be a beautiful example of that kind of flower.

Malcolm Budd takes issue with this requirement for judgments of taste, arguing that it should be possible to identify a rose as a rose, and yet contemplate the rose's form independently of its being the form of a rose. Budd therefore charitably interprets Kant as saying merely that the kind of thing an object is must not figure in our reflection on its form, when it comes to forming aesthetic value judgments.<sup>54</sup> I can judge that a rose is beautiful while being aware that it is a rose, but my judgment should be based on the feelings I get from the rose's form, and not from its identity as a rose.

According to Kant, then, aesthetic value judgments are disinterested assessments of how the form of an object makes one feel. In judging on the basis of this that an object is beautiful, one implies that others ought to find it beautiful too. As well as locating aesthetic value judgments in a general taxonomy of judgments, Kant gives an account of the feelings, or aesthetic experiences, on which such judgments are based. I will now briefly explain this view, as in chapter 4 I draw on Kant's conception of aesthetic pleasure to explain how a work may be aesthetically valuable in virtue of the values of aesthetic experiences it is apt to produce.

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<sup>53</sup> KANT 1951, p. 46 (§7).

<sup>54</sup> BUDD, Malcolm. The pure judgement of taste as an aesthetic reflective judgement. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 41:3, 2001: 247-260; p. 253.

## 2.5 Aesthetic Experience

The pleasure of beauty, according to Kant, is a conscious awareness of the harmonious interplay of one's understanding and one's imagination. This interplay is said to involve the imagination arousing the understanding, and the understanding then regulating the imagination:

*If the determining ground of our judgement as to this universal communicability of the representation is to be merely subjective, i.e. is conceived independently of any concept of the object, it can be nothing else than the state of mind, which is to be met with in the relation of our representative powers to each other...*

*The cognitive powers, which are involved by this representation, are here in free play, because no definite concept limits them to a particular rule of cognition. Hence, the state of mind in this representation must be a feeling of the free play of the representative powers in a given representation with reference to a cognition in general. Now a representation by which an object is given, that is to become a cognition in general, requires imagination, for the gathering together the manifold of intuition, and understanding, for the unity of the concept uniting the representations.<sup>55</sup>*

Kant's complex theory of the imagination which he employs in the above can be contrasted with that of various contemporary writers on the subject (for example Kathleen Stock), who claim that imagination is a type of unasserted mental representation: one imagines that P

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<sup>55</sup> KANT 1951, p. 52 (§9).

by entertaining the thought that P but not, as with a belief, assenting to the proposition that P.<sup>56</sup> Despite not capturing Kant's understanding of the imagination, the notion that to imagine that P is to entertain, without asserting, that P, may be compatible with a certain Kant-inspired psychology of aesthetic experience.

As with representations which *are* asserted or assented to, imaginings can generate experiences involving other mental states such as beliefs, emotions and quasi-perceptions. Roughly-speaking, the interaction between (what he calls) imagination and understanding is what characterises the aesthetic experience of beauty according to Kant, and it is a source of pleasure:

*This merely subjective (aesthetical) judging of the object, or of the representation by which it is given, precedes the pleasure in it, and is the ground of this pleasure in the harmony of the cognitive faculties; but on the universality of the subjective conditions for judging of objects is alone based the universal subjective validity of the satisfaction bound up by us with the representation of the object that we call beautiful.*<sup>57</sup>

Budd describes Kant's idea of the experience of beauty as a balance between order and complexity: the imagination thrives on the complexity of the beautiful object, whereas the understanding thrives on simple orderliness, and regulates the experiences produced by the imagination.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> STOCK, Kathleen. The Role of Imagining in Seeing-In. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 66:4, 2008: 365-380.

<sup>57</sup> KANT 1951, pp. 52-3 (§9).

<sup>58</sup> BUDD 2001, p. 258.

The end result of this harmony between the imagination and the understanding in the aesthetic experience of beauty is, Kant claims, a feeling of *purposiveness* without purpose: the form of the beautiful object is appreciated as if it had been designed to fulfil a definite purpose (that is, some purpose other than that of producing this feeling of purposiveness), when in fact it need have no definite purpose.<sup>59</sup> As I will attempt to demonstrate, a non-Kantian conception of imagination as unasserted mental representation can form part of a conception of aesthetic experience as involving something rather like what Kant seems to have been referring to in his discussion of ‘purposiveness’.

Kant focuses on beauty in nature rather than in art, and so on his view this feeling of purposiveness might be something like the feeling that many theists claim to have upon apprehending objects in nature: they compare natural objects to man-made things, for example William Paley compares nature to a watch, arguing that it has the appearance of design which is best explained by it having been designed by some intelligent being, just like a watch.<sup>60</sup>

Assuming, as I do, that natural objects are not designed, it may be true that our appreciation of their beauty nevertheless involves appreciating their form *as if* it were designed to perform various functions. Of course, given Kant’s claim that aesthetic value judgments are non-conceptual, it is unclear exactly how one might aesthetically appreciate something as if it were designed to fulfil a purpose, as it seems this might involve *conceiving* of it as having such a purpose. But perhaps it need not involve this: one might have similar feelings occasioned by a natural object to the feelings one might have when conceiving of an object

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<sup>59</sup> KANT 1951, pp. 55-6 (§10).

<sup>60</sup> PALEY, William. *Natural Theology; Or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature by William Paley, Dd...* FC and J. Rivington, 1819.

as having been designed to perform a function, without the feelings in the former case depending on any such conception. Similarly, one can respond to sad music as one would respond to a sad person, without conceiving of the music as actually feeling anything. Derek Matravers describes this as responding to music with the non-representational aspect of an emotion that one might have in response to something that is genuinely sad, in a way that abstract sounds cannot be.<sup>61</sup> I discuss emotions in music in §4.4.5.

### 2.5.1 Aesthetic Pleasure

The judgment that something is beautiful is, according to Kant, the judgment that people in general ought to respond to it with a subjective feeling of purposiveness, which results from the harmonious interplay between our imagination and our understanding:

*...it is the universal capability of communication of the mental state in the given representation which, as the subjective condition of the judgement of taste, must be fundamental, and must have the pleasure in the object as its consequent...*

*...The subjective universal communicability of the mode of representation in a judgement of taste, since it is to be possible without presupposing a definite concept, can refer to nothing else than the state of mind in the free play of the Imagination and the Understanding...*

*...The pleasure that we feel is, in a judgement of taste, necessarily imputed by us to everyone else; as if, when we call a thing beautiful, it*

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<sup>61</sup> MATRAVERS, Derek. *Art and emotion*. Oxford University Press, 1998.

*is to be regarded as a characteristic of the object which is determined in it according to concepts; though beauty, without a reference to the feeling of the subject, is nothing by itself...*

*....A representation which, as singular and apart from comparison with others, yet has an agreement with the conditions of universality which it is the business of the understanding to supply, brings the cognitive faculties into that proportionate accord which we require for all cognition, and so regard as holding for everyone...<sup>62</sup>*

Kant's account of the feelings relevant to the aesthetic evaluation of objects is rather more complex than Hume's claim that sentiments are at the core of aesthetic taste. Another interesting difference between Hume and Kant's aesthetic theories is that Hume emphasizes the sentiments of the ideal critic in ideal conditions, whereas Kant claims that we are all similar enough that something can be beautiful if it is disposed to produce particular feelings in any one of us, whether or not we meet the criteria for ideal criticism.<sup>63</sup> On the one hand, Hume has ideas about how we can apprehend works of art objectively and have feelings which are based on the minute details of their forms, rather than on what our minds project onto them. Kant, on the other hand, focuses largely on what is going on in the mind of somebody undergoing an aesthetic experience, and has a specific idea of which feelings are beauty experiences and which are not.

I will now move towards an account of aesthetic values which incorporates Hume's notion of the ideal critic and a Kant-inspired notion of aesthetic enjoyment, which I will argue can

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<sup>62</sup> KANT 1951, pp. 51-4 (§9).

<sup>63</sup> KANT 1951, pp. 75-6 (§21).

account for the conflicting intuitions that comprise the paradox of taste. In doing so I make no claim to being faithful to either Hume or Kant's theories of the aesthetic, which in various ways are in opposition. Rather, I merely propose an ideal observer theory which emphasises the importance of some form of imagination in the appreciation of the aesthetic values of art.

Kant makes further remarks about aesthetic value judgments regarding what he calls their 'purposiveness' and 'necessity'. I return to the notion of purposiveness in chapter 4, but again, I will not attempt to articulate or defend Kant's account of aesthetic value judgments in its entirety. As described in §2.4, the account does suggest what might distinguish aesthetic evaluation from other sorts of evaluation, namely that aesthetic evaluation is based on disinterested feelings and is non-conceptual and implies universal validity; this in turn may distinguish aesthetic values from other sorts of value.

For instance, perhaps moral evaluation necessarily involves conceptual classification, for example classifying an act as harmful, whereas aesthetic evaluation might not. Perhaps moral evaluation or the evaluation of something as agreeable or disagreeable depends on one's desires or interests in a way that aesthetic evaluation should not. It certainly seems right that when ascribing aesthetic values to an object one should pay attention to how it feels to experience the object, in a way that would be inappropriate when making many empirical or logical judgments, for example in the sciences. Lastly and most importantly for my purposes, it seems that at least some of our aesthetic value judgments, for example those which are expressed in critical reviews, imply a universal validity that is at odds with the widespread intuition that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I will now consider to what extent Kant was right in his characterization of aesthetic experience, and introduce the

notion that aesthetic values in art can be identified with the capacity to cause us to take pleasure in our aesthetic experience of a work.

I agree with Kant at least to the extent that aesthetic experiences, roughly, are a type of experience that we can enjoy, involving the interaction of distinct cognitive faculties, which some works of art can elicit. I will argue in chapter 4 that the involvement of the three elements of pleasure, understanding and some form of imagination, is an appropriate way to characterise the distinctiveness of (positive) aesthetic experience. In that chapter I will also argue that the inclusion of pleasure in such a characterisation is not threatened by observations that there are good works which quite deliberately induce unpleasant feelings such as fear or sadness.

We have aesthetic experiences when we engage with works of art, with parts of nature such as sunsets, and perhaps with other things such as mathematical proofs. One interpretation of aesthetic value judgments is that they are about the instrumental values of objects to produce intrinsically valuable aesthetic experiences. This is a view that Robert Stecker endorses and identifies as a minimal assumption of various theories of aesthetic values which analyse them in terms of aesthetic experiences.<sup>64</sup> [Corrected thesis.docx - ftn40](#) These theories include Jerrold Levinson's which I draw on in chapter 3, and also Kendall Walton's and Roger Scruton's, both of which I draw on in chapter 4.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> STECKER, Robert. Aesthetic experience and aesthetic value. *Philosophy Compass*, 1:1, 2006: 1-10; p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> LEVINSON, J. *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*. Cornell University Press, 1996.

SCRUTON, Roger. *Art and Imagination: a study in the philosophy of mind*. Methuen & co. Ltd., 1974.

WALTON, Kendall L. How marvellous! Toward a theory of aesthetic value. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51:3, 1993: 499-510.

If aesthetic experience can be identified not as the ordinary experience of distinctively aesthetic properties, but rather as a distinctively aesthetic state of mind, the causes of which are mundane properties which (in an appropriate engagement with a valuable work of art) may be identified as constitutive of 'aesthetic properties', then we can regard aesthetic values as objective in the sense that they supervene on response-independent properties of objects which have the instrumental value of being apt to produce valuable aesthetic responses. A broad range of objects may be instrumentally valuable in this way. A sunset may be beautiful because, say, its colours are capable of making a human being undergo a valuable aesthetic experience. For a novel the beauty-making features may be themes and ideas which, when understood, can produce valuable aesthetic experiences.

### 2.5.3 Combining Ideas from Kant and Hume

Hume believes that beautiful works of art are naturally fitted to arouse sentiments of beauty for ideal critics in ideal conditions, and that this is what makes such works beautiful. In some sense, then, beauty is in the eye of the beholder because it is realised by subjective, sentimental experiences, or rather dependent on our capacity to respond with such experiences. But the objective features of art objects are important, and not just anything can qualify as beautiful; not only must the work produce beauty sentiments, it must be naturally fitted to do so. I attempt to make sense of this natural fit in §3.4.4.

It seems possible to have an Ideal Observer Theory in which the relevant ideal responses are those that spring from a harmonious interplay between the intellect and the imagination. Accounts like this have been attempted. For example, Richard Miller has a Kant-inspired theory of aesthetic experience as a learning-like process in which a work of art engages the intellect in the pursuit of some elusive goal, so that the work might be described as

purposive but without purpose.<sup>66</sup> The learning-like process resembles learning in certain respects, but need not involve actual learning; I explain this in further detail in §4.1.3. Having endorsed this Kant-inspired view of aesthetic experience, Miller then appeals to Hume's notion of the ideal critic in ideal conditions as the standard of taste, but for judgments based on these learning-like experiences.<sup>67</sup>

For Miller, aesthetic values are dispositions to produce enjoyable learning-like experiences, and the standard of taste is the highest amount of pleasure that can be had from such an experience, by an ideal critic in ideal conditions.<sup>68</sup> It is thought to be a matter of fact just how pleasurable such an experience can be for an ideal critic, and so Miller has an account which tries to show that aesthetic values are objective by drawing elements from both Kant's and Hume's previous attempts.

In chapter 4 I take Miller's account seriously as an explanation of how an aesthetic experience might be valuable, but for now I mention it only to demonstrate that certain elements of Hume's and Kant's accounts may be compatible. Kant focuses on what aesthetic judgments and experiences involve, whereas Hume focuses on what standards can be brought to bear on aesthetic judgments and experiences, so that we might identify some of them as deficient and non-indicative of the aesthetic values of works of art.

My Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism, and the extent to which it borrows from Hume and Kant's theories, will become clearer in the following two chapters. In chapter 3 I will argue that aesthetic values are moderately objective in the sense that they are realized by

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<sup>66</sup> MILLER, Richard W. Three versions of objectivity: aesthetic, moral, and scientific. In LEVINSON, Jerrold (ed.) *Aesthetics and ethics: Essays at the intersection*. Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 26-58.

<sup>67</sup> MILLER 2001, p. 40.

<sup>68</sup> MILLER 2001, p. 41.

properties naturally fitted to please human sensibilities. In chapter 4 I will argue that the pleasure or displeasure of distinctively aesthetic experiences of works of art is primary in the constitution of the aesthetic values of those works.

## 2.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I have identified thick and thin varieties of aesthetic values in art and suggested that what is captured by the descriptive elements of thick aesthetic value predicates may be that in virtue of which an art work falls under not only those thick concepts but also the thin aesthetic value concepts of beauty and ugliness. In other words, works of art may be beautiful or ugly in virtue of their properties. However, aesthetic value judgments about works of art seem essentially to be based on the subjective experiences they cause us to have, and this suggests that a work may be aesthetically valuable insofar as it can make us have certain kinds of experience. These observations are captured in the paradoxical common-sense understanding of taste, according to which aesthetic values in art are subjective and yet we can misattribute them. Hume recognised this and offered a solution which can be construed as a type of Response-Dependence, and which will form the basis for the Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism I defend in the remaining chapters of this dissertation. I will now begin this process with a more detailed exposition of Hume's account.

## 3. Humean Response-Dependence

### 3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I begin to develop an account of aesthetic values in art that addresses the apparent paradox of taste which I described in §2.3. This involves revising Hume’s standard of taste to account for different critics in ideal circumstances experiencing a work as having different aesthetic values, without this precluding the ontological objectivity of aesthetic values in art. I also revise the theory according to Levinson’s proposed solution to what he calls ‘the real problem’.<sup>69</sup> I suggest that the standard of taste should be interpreted as a form of Response-Dependence, and I defend my own Humean Response-Dependence thesis from the charge that it is viciously circular or uninformative. I argue that critics in ideal circumstances can be described as detectors of aesthetic values-as-dispositions. I defend this dispositional analysis from some initial objections.

### 3.1 The Standard of Taste

In §2.3 I began to introduce Hume’s theory of the standard of taste, according to which a work of art is beautiful insofar as it produces sentiments of beauty in ideal circumstances. As Paul Boghossian and David Velleman explain with respect to “standard” (or normal) conditions, the dichotomy between types of ‘condition’ and types of ‘observer’ is unnecessary: characteristics of an observer and of the conditions in which an observer stands are all circumstances relevant to whether one is a normal or ideal observer with

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<sup>69</sup> LEVINSON, Jerrold. Hume’s standard of taste: the real problem. *The journal of aesthetics and art criticism*, 60:3, 2002: 227-238.

respect to that which she observes.<sup>70</sup> I will therefore continue to use the phrase ‘ideal circumstances’ to refer to the circumstances in which one is an ideal critic in ideal conditions (I will explain what this means shortly).

In outlining Hume’s theory I will further clarify the theory that I wish to defend, which is largely indebted to Hume’s, but I do not wish to be committed to all and only what Hume claims about art and value, or even to claim to be giving an accurate interpretation of Hume’s essay. My purpose here is simply to develop a plausible account of aesthetic values in art which might succeed in resolving the paradox of taste, which seems to have been Hume’s ambition. I will draw heavily on my interpretation of Hume, but anyone who disagrees with my interpretation may regard my own account simply as less derivative (of Hume at least) than I think it is. I will argue that the aesthetic responses a critic would have to a work of art in ideal circumstances are a measure of the work’s aesthetic capacities relative to human sensibilities.

Hume’s theory of the standard of taste can be stated as a Response-Dependence biconditional:

*Hume’s Standard of Taste*: A work is beautiful if and only if the joint verdict of critics in ideal circumstances would be that the work is beautiful.<sup>71</sup>

Such a view, being a type of Response-Dependence, seems to involve analysing the concept ‘beauty’ as shaped by human capacities to respond to works of art, determining which features of which works the concept falls upon (I explained this in §1.3.2).

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<sup>70</sup> BOGHOSSIAN & VELLEMAN 1989, p. 84.

<sup>71</sup> HUME 1985, p. 241.

A critic in ideal circumstances is an idealised human being in a state of epistemic objectivity, with barriers to veridical perception and objective appreciation removed, allowing her dispositions to respond, which constitute her sensibility, to manifest in her aesthetic experiences of a work of art. Before I come to Hume's list of characteristics conducive to such a degree of epistemic objectivity, here again is Railton's list of abilities involved in what I am calling 'epistemic objectivity', as I presented them in §1.1:

1. The ability to reliably detect things.
2. The ability to reason well.
3. The ability to be impartial or disinterested.<sup>72</sup>

Hume summarises the characteristics of the ideal critic as follows:

*Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty.*<sup>73</sup>

Hume characterises the ideal critic as having the above five characteristics. He also claims that ideal circumstances will involve being in the right mood and paying attention.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.1.1 Ideal Circumstances

It seems to be an empirical question whether something is helpful in allowing observers to recognise and appreciate what we might suppose are aesthetically valuable works of art. I believe that such questions are best answered by empirical research that I am perhaps not

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<sup>72</sup> RAILTON 2001, pp. 63-5.

<sup>73</sup> HUME 1985, p. 241.

<sup>74</sup> HUME 1985, pp. 232-3.

qualified to evaluate, let alone conduct. But Levinson plausibly hypothesises that we should include “emotional responsiveness” and “reflective capacity” in the list of ideal critical characteristics.<sup>75</sup> He suggests, however, that this should not open the floodgates to just any revision to the criteria:

*...if we open the door to expanding the list, can we justifiably exclude any objective virtue of a cognitive or affective sort, e.g., knowing the calculus, being kind to those in need, being sober and reliable, being a good listener, and so on? The answer is that we can, from our present vantage point, exclude those, since although admittedly virtues of some sort, they are not ones that have been found particularly helpful in recognizing and appreciating great works of art in any art form, whereas the marks that Hume proposes, and others that we might reasonably add, presumably have been.<sup>76</sup>*

Why presume that certain ‘virtues’ have proved helpful in the recognition and appreciation of great art? This relates to Levinson’s proposal that we can independently identify some masterpieces of art, and calibrate ideal circumstances so that they are conducive to the recognition and appreciation of the values of such works. I defend this proposal in §3.3.1. Supposing that we can identify ideal circumstances by their conduciveness to the appreciation of particular works, whether a circumstance is conducive to this or not will be an empirical matter that I will not attempt to settle.

I therefore adopt a “whatever it takes” conception of ideal circumstances: whatever circumstances turn out to be conducive to allowing a human subject to harvest a work’s

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<sup>75</sup> LEVINSON 2002, p. 237.

<sup>76</sup> LEVINSON 2002, p.237.

capacities to produce valuable aesthetic experiences; these are the ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of that work. I say *that* work rather than works of art in general because it seems that ideal circumstances may vary for different works: for example, one should perhaps watch a Horror film in the dark, whereas one should perhaps look at a painting in normal lighting conditions. Doubtless it will appear vacuous to defend an ideal observer theory of values according to which ideal circumstances are whatever circumstances put one in touch with values, but in this chapter I will attempt to show that this need not be vacuous. For the defence of what I have called a “whatever it takes” conception of ideal circumstances, see §3.6.4.

### 3.1.2 Ideal Circumstances for the Detection of Aesthetic Values

Ideal circumstances allow the aesthetic capacities of a work to manifest in one’s aesthetic experience. The evaluations of a critic in ideal circumstances should not be seen as authoritative commands about what we should and should not appreciate in art; rather, aesthetic evaluations act as evidence that a work affords certain experiences.

The closer these evaluations are to being made in ideal circumstances, the more informative they are about a work’s aesthetic values *qua* capacities to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. As an athlete’s physical fitness improves, so does their athletic performance. Things might get in the way of good performance, such as psychological barriers, but improvements in fitness will, it seems, only ever contribute to better performance, and they never make performance worse. The refinement of a critic’s aesthetic sensibility relative to the ideal standard, for example an improved ability to make fine perceptual discriminations, has an analogous effect on her ability to experience the ideal aesthetic responses a work has the capacity to elicit. Of course, I need to say more to

establish that there is an ideal standard and a sense in which one's critical fitness can improve relative to that standard, as I will in due course.

Identifying a set of conditions and characteristics as ideal for aesthetic appreciation allows us, at the very least, to share information with each other about the aesthetic experiences offered by a work in a particular set of circumstances. For example, one can recommend a film to others on the basis that, if they view it under certain circumstances, such as being in a particular mood and focusing on certain features of the film, they are likely to find the experience of viewing the film a rewarding one. Alternatively, one might assert truthfully, to one's fellow humans who as fellow humans likely share relevant neuro-chemical (and other) similarities, that they are likely to enjoy themselves if they take LSD and watch *The Wizard of Oz*. But this does not necessarily imply that this is something that they should do, or that their enjoyment would be somehow be more appropriate than some other response they might have to the same film in different circumstances.

Of course, it does not seem to be the case that the experiences people in general would tend to have watching a film under the influence of a powerful drug is indicative of that film's aesthetic values. The reason this does not seem to be the case might be that the drug would do much of the work in generating one's experience. It might be just as rewarding to view *Plan 9 from Outer Space* under the influence of LSD, even though the latter is often regarded as the worst film ever made. Therefore, more needs to be said to explain what is ideal about ideal circumstances, as opposed to other circumstances which might be conducive to rewarding experiences.

One might defend nothing more than a modest element of Hume's account, analogous to the following claim about colour: if you view object O in circumstances C, it will probably

look green to you; that is not to say that *O is green*, merely that it will probably *look* green in C. However, on a Humean account, ideal circumstances can do more than this, just as identifying normal circumstances in a Response-Dependence analysis of 'green' can arguably tell us which objects *are* green. It seems that we can say that an object that looks green to normal subjects in normal lighting conditions is a green object, and I want to defend a similar view of aesthetic values such that the value of experiencing an art work in a particular set of circumstances is its objective aesthetic value.

Before I can defend such a Humean account, there are two main problems that I will argue require further revision of Hume's standard of taste. Firstly, it seems that different ideal critics in ideal conditions might experience the same work differently (Hume seems to acknowledge this but the explanation I propose is not his).<sup>77</sup> Secondly, it is unclear why we who are not ideal critics should be interested in what ideal critics would appreciate, rather than for instance in what people on LSD might appreciate.

### 3.2 Equally Valid Aesthetic Experiences

A critic in ideal circumstances is in a state of epistemic objectivity conducive to the joint manifestation of dispositions possessed by a work of art and by the critic herself. For example, human beings are normally disposed to be moved by expressions of sadness, so at least some works that have the property of being expressive of sadness will likely be disposed to trigger the manifestation of one's disposition to be moved by expressions of sadness.

But people differ, perhaps in ways that will be manifest in individual aesthetic experiences had by critics in ideal circumstances: for example, one person might be naturally disposed to

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<sup>77</sup> HUME 1985, p. 243-4.

respond to sadness with feelings of pity, whereas another person might be more inclined to respond with feelings of despair. It is at least possible that some such differences of sensibility are not ruled out by ideal circumstances. To define ideal circumstances such that this would not be possible might be to inappropriately rule out certain valuable ways of responding to a work having understood it correctly. This becomes plausible given certain cases where it appears that experiencing a work differently to others is justified.

One example might be a family film which aims to entertain children while simultaneously appealing to their parents.<sup>78</sup> Suppose the film provides children with aesthetic experiences involving childish wonder and excitement, and provides their parents with satirical content and humour. Children it seems can be in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience at least of this sort of film, as can adults, but the sensibilities of children may be such that their experiences of the film are unavoidably different in content and value to those of adult critics in ideal circumstances. Furthermore, the film is designed to offer both of these types of aesthetic experience, which perhaps cannot be had simultaneously. This might be a problem for a Humean account of aesthetic values in art, as a critic in ideal circumstances might judge a film to be, say, merely satirical and amusing, when in fact it is also exciting and dramatic as it offers experiences of that sort to other critics in ideal circumstances. Hume does try to account for what he calls 'blameless disagreements', and I describe his views on this in §5.3.2.

As well as being apt to produce differently valuable aesthetic experiences for different critics in ideal circumstances, the same work might offer more than one distinct aesthetic experience to the same critic at different times. For example the ideal first viewing of a film

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<sup>78</sup> Thanks to Tom Baker for this example.

might involve intense emotional experiences and reactions of surprise to events on-screen, whereas the ideal second viewing may involve an attention to details which had to be overlooked upon first viewing in order for the first experience to be as intense as it was. It seems at least possible for a work to not only stand up to repeated viewings in ideal circumstances, but to reward repeated viewings by actually offering distinct valuable aesthetic experiences on different occasions, which one could not access without viewing the work more than once.

A critic in ideal circumstances could read *Wuthering Heights* twice and experience it once as a Romantic novel and once as a Gothic novel. Or these experiences might be had by different critics in ideal circumstances due to differences between the critics that are not ruled out by such circumstances. Perhaps such a case should be understood as a case where there is more than one equally apt interpretation of the work; Gregory Currie argues that this can be the case for works of Literature.<sup>79</sup> The value of the work cannot, on a Humean account, correspond to any one of a number of multiple interpretative responses it is apt to produce if these can take place in ideal circumstances. To accommodate this apparent limit to the epistemic objectivity of critics in ideal circumstances, I will now suggest a revision to Hume's standard of taste.

### 3.2.1 Ideal Circumstances for Aesthetic Experience

I argue in chapter 4 that a work of art is aesthetically valuable insofar as aesthetic experiences of the work in ideal circumstances are themselves valuable. But it should already be clear that aesthetically experiencing a work in ideal circumstances will not necessarily give one a comprehensive overview of all of a work's capacities to produce

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<sup>79</sup> CURRIE, Gregory. Interpretation and objectivity. *Mind*, 102:407, 1993: 413-428.

valuable ideal aesthetic experiences. This is because the same work may be apt to produce distinct aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances on different occasions, or for different observers. As I explain in chapter 5, such variety in the experiences of different critics does not necessarily amount to disagreement, and therefore does not necessarily amount to what is called 'faultless disagreement'. But whether or not it involves disagreement, the possibility that critics in ideal circumstances could experience the same work differently suggests that ideal circumstances fall short of being circumstances of infallibility regarding the aesthetic values of a work of art. I will now suggest a distinction between two sets of ideal circumstances, to account on the one hand for the fallibility of the critic in ideal circumstances as understood so far, and yet on the other hand to shore up the objectivity of aesthetic values on my account despite this fallibility.

To form a comprehensive assessment of a work's aesthetic values one may need to move beyond one's own experience of a work at a particular time, and take into account the work's capacities to produce ideal aesthetic experiences other than that which one is currently undergoing. Experiencing a work in ideal circumstances might therefore be inadequate for one to form a comprehensive overview of a work's aesthetic values. For that reason, it seems there should be a distinction between two different purposes for which a set of 'ideal circumstances' may be defined: the appreciation of aesthetic values in art; and the formation of a comprehensive overview of the aesthetic values of a work. This distinction will help to clarify the extent of and the limits to the objectivity of aesthetic values in art on the account that I am constructing and defending.

I will refer from now on to the *ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience*: the circumstances in which one's aesthetic experiences reflect at least some of the aesthetic

values of the work. I will refer to a critic in such circumstances as an *ideal aesthetic experiencer*. To be an ideal aesthetic experiencer is to do all one can to use art for its intended purpose, which is to provide valuable aesthetic experiences. One will be in an ideal state of epistemic objectivity, something along the lines of the criteria for ideal criticism that Hume suggests, relative to the work in question. For example, one might watch a film in a dark theatre, in a calm state of mind, understanding the film completely, noticing its details and so on. But as I have explained, this might only give one an incomplete knowledge of the work's array of aesthetic values. Nonetheless, one will be in the optimum attainable position for the actual *appreciation* of aesthetic values of the art work in question.

Appreciation here should be understood as an acquaintance with valuable features of the work and the undergoing of the relevant aesthetic experiences, for example the feeling of being 'swept away' by a work which is beautifully expressive of emotion. Aesthetic appreciation should be contrasted with aesthetic judgment, the formation of beliefs about aesthetic values in a work, even though one's appreciation may give one good grounds for an aesthetic judgment. This distinction between appreciation and judgment will prove important in chapter 7, where I will argue that acquaintance with a work, while necessary for appreciation, may not be necessary for one to reliably form or revise one's aesthetic judgments of a work.

### 3.2.2 Ideal Circumstances for Aesthetic Judgment

To get a comprehensive overview of a work's aesthetic values, one might need to move beyond one's perspectival limitations. In other words, if the same work can produce differently valuable aesthetic experiences for different ideal aesthetic experiencers, then

the aesthetic value judgments of one ideal aesthetic experiencer might only reflect some of the work's aesthetic values *qua* capacities to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in the circumstances ideal for aesthetic experience. But if one can somehow be aware of all of these capacities of a work relative to all possible ideal aesthetic experiencers, one could then have a comprehensive picture of the aesthetic values of the work. One could then, for example, be aware of a good family film's capacities to please children and its capacities to please adults, even though one cannot be both an adult and a child simultaneously and therefore perhaps cannot appreciate all of the film's aesthetic capacities.

I will from now on refer to a hypothetical critic who has fully succeeded in being comprehensively aware of a work's array of aesthetic values—where not all of those values are manifest in any one ideal aesthetic experience of the work—as a critic in the *ideal circumstances for aesthetic judgment*, or an *ideal aesthetic judge*.

One who is in the ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience can get on with enjoying a work of art (or finding it to be unpleasant if it is ugly) without reflecting on whether one is in the ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience. It may be the case that paying attention to how one's circumstances compare to the ideal will help one move closer to the ideal for the purpose of gaining access to especially valuable aesthetic experiences, but being in the circumstances is not something that one needs to be aware of in order to enjoy. I am assuming Epistemic Externalism here, which I will briefly explain.

*Epistemic Externalism* says that to be in a state of knowledge that P one does not need to be aware of being in such a state; a knowledge relationship can hold independently of whether one meets any of the conditions for being in a second knowledge relationship with the fact

that one is in the first.<sup>80</sup> One does not need to know *that one knows that P*, in order simply to know *that P*. One can therefore know what aesthetic values a work of art has without knowing that one knows this, and therefore without knowing that one is in the ideal circumstances for aesthetic judgment. Similarly, one does not need to be aware that one is in the circumstances for the aesthetic experience of an art work, in order for one to be in those circumstances and thus to be in a position to aesthetically appreciate aspects of the work. I will now give some further clarifications of my Humean account as it stands thus far.

### 3.2.3 Further Clarifications

Another important clarification is that the distinction between ideal aesthetic experiencers and ideal aesthetic judges is not meant to imply that ideal aesthetic experiencers do not make aesthetic value judgments about the works they experience. Such judgments may even be necessary for one to have an ideal aesthetic experience. For example, to appreciate the humour in a piece of comic prose it is possible that one would need to form a judgment according to which the writing has the value of being amusing; whether such cases occur I am not sure, but I am not them out. But a full comprehensive awareness of a work's capacities to produce distinct ideal aesthetic experiences on different occasions or for different observers is not necessary for one to have an ideal aesthetic experience, and may even preclude having such an experience. To have an ideal aesthetic experience of a work one may need to allow one's aesthetic sensibility to manifest itself in ways that are not compatible with the dispassionate process of inference required to comprehensively assess a work's aesthetic capacities, for instance on the basis of aesthetic testimony from people

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<sup>80</sup> For an explanation and defence of Epistemic Externalism see, for example, GOLDMAN, Alvin. Internalism, Externalism, and the Architecture of Justification, *Journal of Philosophy*, 106:6, 2009: 309-338.

with different aesthetic sensibilities (in chapter 7 I argue that it is possible to infer a work's aesthetic values on the basis of aesthetic testimony).

For example, the best way to appreciate sad music is, presumably, to be moved by it, but supposing that there are a variety of ways an ideal aesthetic experiencer might be moved by the music, the best way to make a *comprehensive* aesthetic value judgment of the music would be to attribute aesthetic values to it on the basis of all of its capacities to produce such emotional experiences. One might not be able to have all of these different emotional experiences at once, or even one after the other, even in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of the work; perhaps normal people differ unavoidably in their emotional capacities. So the comprehensive ideal evaluation of some works perhaps cannot be from some unified perspective as with ideal aesthetic experience. Rather, the ideal aesthetic judge must judge the work according to the relations it bears to a variety of perspectives: the perspectives of different ideal aesthetic experiencers or of ideal aesthetic experiencers on different occasions or subsequent viewings.

The omniscience of the ideal aesthetic judge may be unobtainable, but that is no objection to what I am claiming here: I introduce the concept of the ideal judge merely as a theoretical device, in an attempt to clarify in what sense I wish to claim that aesthetic values in art are objective. The point here is not that such critics can exist or that such an ideal is desirable, but that there can be more to a work's aesthetic values than even an ideal aesthetic experiencer could be aware of, because different ideal aesthetic experiencers could experience the same work differently. It may be that the best we can do in evaluating a work is to make accurate but not necessarily comprehensive aesthetic value judgments, and such judgments are available to the ideal aesthetic experiencer. Unlike ideal aesthetic

judgments, ideal aesthetic experiences are both obtainable and desirable: the purpose of art is to provide valuable aesthetic experiences (as I argue in chapter 4), and by striving to undergo ideal aesthetic experiences we strive to experience the manifestation of at least some of a work's aesthetic values. By having such experiences we can appreciate the aesthetic values of art; and on the basis of such experiences we can also make true judgments about those values of the work.

In introducing the above distinction between ideal circumstances for experience and for judgment, I have implied that, although aesthetic values in art may be largely objective, we may have very limited epistemic access to them. We may have plenty of opportunity to appreciate these values in our aesthetic experiences of art, but forming comprehensive and accurate judgments about a work's array of values may be practically impossible. But the perspectival limitations that might be necessary for ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of a work need only preclude the comprehensiveness that an ideal judgment would in theory be capable of attaining. An ideal aesthetic experiencer would be in a good position to form accurate judgments about values in a work, but their judgment may be far from exhaustive in accounting for all of the work's aesthetic values.

Another implication of the account I am describing is that it might be possible for the same descriptive property of a work to realise both positive and negative aesthetic values. Suppose that two critics are in the ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience or appreciation of a work, but their sensibilities differ enough such that one of them finds property P as instantiated in the work to be ugly, and the other finds it beautiful. P would then realise both positive and negative aesthetic values in the work. I will discuss this

implication of my view in §5.3.3. Now I will consider another modification to Hume's account.

### 3.3 The Real Problem

Humean Response-Dependence is vulnerable to what Levinson calls "the real problem".<sup>81</sup> The problem is that for all Hume says it seems that while it may be the case that in particular circumstances people will respond in certain ways to certain objects, it is unclear in what sense some such circumstances are 'ideal' and others are not. It is not necessarily the case that the ideal critic in ideal conditions will enjoy art more than others do; rather, she is supposed to enjoy 'good' art more than she enjoys 'bad' art, and in fact there will be many works of art, perhaps most works, which she hardly enjoys if at all. In other circumstances people might receive more enjoyment from their engagement with art than they do in 'ideal' circumstances for aesthetic experience, so what is so ideal about 'ideal' circumstances?

Levinson invents the term "izeal" to describe an arbitrary set of circumstances different to ideal circumstances, and notes that the izeal critic in izeal conditions will have experiences as of beauty when presented with some objects and not others.<sup>82</sup> The set of works apt to produce valuable aesthetic experiences will be different relative to izeal circumstances than to 'ideal' circumstances, but this does not seem to be sufficient to establish that the 'ideal' circumstances really are ideal. Why should we strive to be in ideal circumstances, or trust the judgments of those who are in, or close to, ideal circumstances rather than izeal circumstances?

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<sup>81</sup> LEVINSON 2002.

<sup>82</sup> LEVINSON 2002, p. 229.

Levinson's own solution to the real problem is to modify Hume's characterisation of ideal circumstances so that in ideal circumstances one will have whatever it takes to appreciate masterpieces as identified as those works which are widely appreciated within cultures, across cultures, and across time.<sup>83</sup> Such widespread appreciation is best explained by certain works "possessing an unusual potential to afford aesthetic satisfaction" for human beings in general.<sup>84</sup> This unusual potential is the answer to the real problem: ideal circumstances are special because they are calibrated to the detection and appreciation of unusually marvellous works or features of works of art.

There may be cases in which it is more enjoyable to experience a particular work outside ideal circumstances. But masterpieces by definition are unusually potent as providers of aesthetic pleasure. Ideal circumstances, as calibrated to the appreciation of masterpieces, and the features that make for a masterpiece, will give one access to the most pleasurable aesthetic experiences that art makes available to human sensibilities.

Hume himself suggests that only (but not all) good artists will have a reputation that is durable and general, and that our admiration for his or her works will be all the more sincere because of this. He claims that, unlike theories which are frequently blown out of the water and replaced, "just expressions of passion and nature" maintain their public applause forever.<sup>85</sup> Mothersill interprets Hume as implying that the test of time is the true

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<sup>83</sup> LEVINSON 2002, pp. 233-4.

<sup>84</sup> LEVINSON 2002, p. 233.

<sup>85</sup> HUME 1985, p. 242.

standard of taste and that the sentiments of ideal critics in ideal conditions merely reflect the extent to which works have the capacity to pass the test of time.<sup>86</sup>

This is the inspiration for Levinson's more general claim that masterpieces can be identified by their near-universal appeal and that a critic can be more or less attuned to the value-making features of such works so that they may detect them in works that we do not already know the values of. Passing the test of time and appealing cross-culturally and broadly within cultures is strong evidence that something is aesthetically valuable, as I will explain shortly; but failing these tests is not strong evidence of aesthetic disvalue.

When it is unknown whether a work is a masterpiece or what aesthetic values it may have, the standard of taste will be the responses of critics who are ideally suited to appreciate masterpieces in general, and who are also in whatever circumstances the work in question demands (for example they will understand the work, view it in daylight where appropriate, and so on).<sup>87</sup> I will now say a little more in defence of Levinson's view.

### 3.3.1 Levinson's Solution

An example of the sort of masterpiece that Levinson has in mind, in the above revision of Hume's standard of taste, might be Shakespeare's *King Lear*. This work has been read and performed many times over 400 years and is appreciated by large numbers of people across the world. The film *Ran* is an acclaimed 1985 Japanese film adaptation of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century English play, suggesting that this play is an example of what Levinson refers to: its appreciation is durable over time, crosses cultural and language boundaries and draws large

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<sup>86</sup> MOTHERSILL, Mary. Hume and the Paradox of Taste. In DICKIE, George, SCLAFANI, Richard, and ROBLIN, Ronald (eds.) *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* (2nd ed.) St. Martin's Press, 1989, pp. 269–286.

<sup>87</sup> LEVINSON 2002, pp. 233-4.

audiences. It seems likely that *King Lear* is in some sense worth seeing for most people: it has demonstrated a capacity to provide valuable aesthetic experiences independently of one's cultural or personal biases.

The convergence of judgments by disparate individuals, cultures and eras regarding 'masterpieces' of art is best explained by those works being potent providers of worthwhile human experiences of an aesthetic sort. These indications that a work is a masterpiece are independent from the Humean standard of taste, which consists instead of critics in ideal circumstances responding in ways indicative of the aesthetic values of works of art. But if ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience are those in which one is in a position to have the most valuable aesthetic experiences offered by masterpieces, this can explain why ideal aesthetic experiences are indicative of a work's aesthetic values. A critic with whatever it takes to appreciate masterpieces will plausibly have what it takes to pick up on similar capacities in other works of art, and in doing so identify further reliable sources of valuable aesthetic experience for human beings in general.

One might explain the convergence regarding 'masterpieces' by other means. We might spread aesthetic consensus without any justification, just as ideas can spread widely whether or not they are good ideas. But it is not clear why we would choose what we do choose to spread the appreciation of. Furthermore, an aesthetic consensus might be difficult to achieve if a work is not objectively excellent, as without some sort of justification, people might be reluctant to conform to a consensus. The objectivity of aesthetic values can perhaps offer the best explanation of what convergence there appears to be about the aesthetic merits and defects of particular works, especially in cases of widespread consensus as with what we might call 'masterpieces'.

Calibrating ideal circumstances so that they are conducive to the detection of capacities that lead to such widespread appreciation sets ideal circumstances apart from, say, 'izeal' circumstances. Ideal circumstances, not izeal circumstances, will allow critics to have aesthetic experiences which reflect a work's capacity (if it has one) to be enjoyed so much and by so many people that it could be hailed as a masterpiece. Or if a work has some of the sorts of features that contribute to the appeal of a masterpiece, an ideal aesthetic experiencer will be in a position to pick up on such features in the work. The responses of such critics to works which have not passed or been subjected to these independent tests, of mass appeal across and within times and cultures, will act as the standard of taste for those works.

The circumstances conducive to the manifestation of one's aesthetic sensibility, in combination with the manifestation of whatever dispositions of masterpieces cause people to appreciate them so much, will be ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience and we will have good reason to privilege them over other circumstances of aesthetic experience. The judgments of ideal aesthetic experiencers will help us find works that can provide us with the most valuable aesthetic experiences, so that we might undergo those experiences and reap the rewards of aesthetic value in art.

Levinson's addition to the standard of taste provides an additional reason for us not to opt out of the project of seeking out valuable aesthetic experiences as an ideal critic would identify them, because to do so would be to overlook masterpieces which demonstrably are a reliable source of worthwhile aesthetic experience. This revision to Hume's standard of taste also helps address one half of the paradox of taste, which as I explained in §2.3 is the motivation for Hume's theory. It already seems that there are masterpieces, different in

value to certain other works, apparently to the extent that a mountain is larger than a molehill. Levinson's claims easily accommodate this intuition, and as I argue in chapter 4 this need not preclude the accommodation of our more subjectivist intuitions.

Levinson's revision to the standard of taste might seem to involve the presupposition that there are masterpieces which are substantially aesthetically valuable, and this might render a Humean Response-Dependence account question-begging. But in fact, all that is presupposed is that certain works are *regarded* as masterpieces due to their widespread appreciation. This is plausibly explained by such works being aesthetically valuable, but this is inferred rather than presupposed, and it allows us to identify critics in ideal circumstances as critics in whatever circumstances turn out to allow them to appreciate masterpieces. Such an account can therefore, although it might involve circularity, remain informative about the relationship between aesthetic values in art and the responses of critics in certain circumstances. I will now consider whether such an account can allow us to say that aesthetic values are ontologically objective.

### 3.4 Response-Dependence

Unlike Hume's Response-Dependence theory of aesthetic values, as I presented it in §3.1, my own account is not merely about beauty but aesthetic values in general, including beauty, ugliness and thick aesthetic values as I described them in §2.2.1. Furthermore, in place of the joint verdict of ideal critics in ideal conditions, I employ the notion of ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience and ideal circumstances for aesthetic judgment, which I explained in §§3.2.1-2. Ideal circumstances for aesthetic *experience* will involve aesthetic experiences which reflect the aesthetic values of a work, due to the relations that hold between human aesthetic sensibilities and the properties of works of art. In cases

where a work is apt to produce more than one distinct ideal aesthetic experience, the ideal circumstances for aesthetic *judgment* (if they are attainable, which seems unlikely) will reflect all of those relations, allowing one to form a comprehensive overview of a work's aesthetic values relative to different sensibilities as they are manifest in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience.

The Response-Dependence thesis that I endorse in my account may be summarised by the following biconditional:

*Aesthetic Response-Dependence*: A work *W* has aesthetic value *V* if and only if a critic in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of *W* would experience *W* as having *V*.

This statement of the account is intended to allow for a work to have aesthetic values that only some ideal aesthetic experiencers would appreciate. The responses of an ideal aesthetic experiencer are a reflection of aesthetic values possessed by a work, but not exhaustively, as other ideal aesthetic experiencers might pick up on further values, so if there is an ideal aesthetic experiencer who does *not* attribute *V* to *W* in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience, this is not evidence that *W* lacks *V*.

Biconditionals such as the above statement of Aesthetic Response-Dependence are circular just in the sense that the concept being analysed appears on both sides of the biconditional.

I mentioned in §1.3.2 that, as Johnston explains, this is only a problem if the thesis is made trivial by the circularity:

*The moral of recent philosophy is that many concepts, and most philosophically interesting concepts, have no interesting analysis...*

*Circularity would be a vice if our aim were reductive definition. However our aim is... the exhibition of conceptual connections. In such an endeavour, circularity is a defect only if it implies the triviality of the biconditional. This is not the general case, for circular biconditionals of the relevant form are often sufficiently contentful to be open to further objection...<sup>88</sup>*

Peter Kivy considers the objection that Hume's account of beauty is circular, but it seems he can be interpreted as addressing whether the account is substantive, since circularity may only be a problem insofar as it prevents the account from being substantive.<sup>89</sup> Kivy's remarks suggest that Hume's account of beauty, while it may be circular, is sufficiently contentful to be subject to further objection.

Kivy claims quite plausibly that the charge of vicious circularity only applies to two of the five characteristics of Hume's ideal critic.<sup>90</sup> The requirement that ideal critics have experience with beautiful works of art does presuppose a standard by which to determine which works of art are beautiful. This point can be illustrated if we imagine that this is the only requirement for ideal circumstances: to determine which works are beautiful we look to the judgments of critics in ideal circumstances, but to determine whether a critic is in ideal circumstances we look at their level of experience with beautiful works of art; this presupposes that we know which works are beautiful, when that is what we are attempting to find out.

A similar problem arises if we consider the ability to draw comparisons between works according to their aesthetic values. Were we to define ideal circumstances as those in

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<sup>88</sup> JOHNSTON 1989, p. 147.

<sup>89</sup> KIVY, Peter. Hume's standard of taste: breaking the circle. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 7:1, 1967: 57-66.

<sup>90</sup> KIVY 1967, pp. 60-3.

which one can reliably compare the relative values of different works of art, we would not be able to identify critics in ideal circumstances without prior knowledge of those values.

The other three characteristics of Hume's ideal critic fare better, because they can be described without mentioning anything to do with beauty, art or Aesthetics. In fact, they correspond (not by accident) to the three kinds of epistemic objectivity proposed by Railton, which I recapped in §3.1: delicacy of sentiment can be described in terms of an ability to detect certain kinds of detail, such as subtle variations in colour; good sense can be described in terms of an ability to reason well; and freedom from prejudice might otherwise be described as the ability to set aside one's interests and biases.

These are ways of being epistemically objective in general, not merely in relation to the aesthetic values of art. The claim that a work is aesthetically valuable if and only if epistemically objective critics would experience it as valuable appears not to be trivial given that epistemic objectivity need not be defined just as the ability to detect aesthetic values in art. I will now proceed to consider the issue of the order of determination which, as I began to explain in chapter 1, arises for Response-Dependence claims such as the one I have presented.

### 3.4.1 The Order of Determination Revisited

As I explained in §1.3.5, analysing a concept as response-dependent raises a question about the order of determination: is a work of art aesthetically valuable because an ideal aesthetic experiencer would respond to it with valuable aesthetic experiences, or would such a critic respond in such a way because the work is aesthetically valuable? The 'because' relationship in such questions seems to be irreflexive, so that it cannot be the case that 'X because Y' and 'Y because X'. I will argue that an ideal aesthetic experiencer would undergo

valuable aesthetic experiences in response to a work *because* that work possesses aesthetic values. Aesthetic values in art are capacities to produce valuable aesthetic experiences, which manifest in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience, so that such critics can detect that, as opposed to make it the case that, a work has certain ontologically objective aesthetic values.

The order of determination dilemma can be seen as between the Realist (and therefore Objectivist) notion that in the right conditions we can detect the real properties of things, and the Anti-Objectivist (and therefore Anti-Realist) notion that the properties of things are constituted by our reliably-formed beliefs about them.<sup>91</sup> Wright poses this dilemma and for the case of colour he suggests that reliably formed beliefs about the colour of an object constitute that object's colour: an object is red *because* it looks red to normal observers in normal conditions. He suggests that shape may involve the opposite order of determination: normal observers in normal conditions may perceive an object as pear-shaped *because* it is pear-shaped, its shape being determined independently of sensory responses or dispositions to perceive it as having one shape or another.<sup>92</sup>

This dilemma marks a distinction between that which is or is not, or perhaps is more or less, ontologically objective. It may seem also to mark a distinction between primary and secondary qualities, given the examples I have just mentioned. However, as I explained in §1.2.1, the distinction between objective and subjective seems to cut across the distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

The order of determination dilemma is expressed by Wright as follows:

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<sup>91</sup> WRIGHT 1993, p. 77.

<sup>92</sup> WRIGHT 1993, pp. 77-81.

*...the order-of-determination constraint...marks the distinction between classes of statements about which our best opinions—opinions conceived by subjects and in circumstances which we think of as cognitively ideal for statements of that kind—(partially) determine the extension of the truth-predicate among them, and classes of statements our best opinions about which at most reflect an extension determined independently.*<sup>93</sup>

Critics in ideal circumstances can therefore play one of two roles in a Response-Dependence account. The truth of attributions of aesthetic value to works of art may be determined by the opinions of ideal attributors, or such opinions may only reflect the independently-determined truth values of such attributions. Aesthetic value judgments may be made true by the responses of ideal aesthetic experiencers or such responses may merely be a source of information about the aesthetic values of a work, without being what makes the information true. I will now defend the latter of these two options. It is debatable whether Hume would agree with me, but I do not claim to be endorsing his account of aesthetic values in full.

### 3.4.2 No Order of Determination

I mentioned that it appears to be incoherent to embrace both directions of determination in a Response-Dependence biconditional, as this would seem to be a violation of the irreflexivity of 'because'. In explaining the view that the order of determination is such that ideal critics in ideal conditions detect the aesthetic values of art, I have made some remarks about the view that in fact those values are determined by those responses; I will return to this apparently subjectivist view in the next few chapters. I have not yet considered the

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<sup>93</sup> WRIGHT 1993, p. 77.

option of denying that there is an order of determination, and that will be the subject of this subsection.

I have proposed the following Response-Dependence thesis:

*Aesthetic Response-Dependence:* A work *W* has aesthetic value *V* if and only if a critic in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of *W* would experience *W* as having *V*.

If one denies that there is any order of determination between a work's values and ideal responses to the work, then one denies the following two claims:

1. *Aesthetic Subjectivism:* *W* has *V* because an ideal aesthetic experiencer would experience *W* as having *V*.
2. *Aesthetic Objectivism:* An ideal aesthetic experiencer would experience *W* as having *V* because *W* has *V*.

It is coherent to simultaneously endorse Aesthetic Response-Dependence and deny claims 1 and 2, but it seems that either 1 or 2 can explain Aesthetic Response-Dependence, and that to deny 1 and 2 is to forgo a basic explanation for Aesthetic Response-Dependence. To illustrate this, I will provide an analogy.

Like the ideal aesthetic experiencer, a chick-sexer is a type of expert. A chick-sexer has the ability to discern the sex of new-born chicks, which requires intensive training. Presumably, for a good chick-sexer, it will be the case more often than not that she judges a chick to be male *because* it is male. It will be false that 'the chick is male *because* the chick-sexer thinks so'; the chick-sexer detects the sex of chicks and obviously does not make it the case that a chick is male or female.

Suppose that a chick is male if and only if a chick-sexer would judge that it is male (she is an ideal chick-sexer). Suppose also that it is neither true that the chick-sexer determines sex nor that she detects it: it is false that a chick is only male because the ideal chick-sexer thinks so; and it is false that it is because a chick is male that the chick-sexer thinks it is. This latter claim is significant: it would be surprising (extremely surprising, though not inconceivable) if a chick-sexer did not detect the sex of chicks and yet judged all and only male chicks to be male chicks. This would be surprising because an ability to detect the sex of chicks would explain why it would be the case that the chick-sexer judges all and only male chicks to be male. Even if it were unclear what this ability was precisely, positing such an ability would be highly explanatory.

It would also be explanatory, though implausible, to suggest that the chick-sexer *makes* chicks either male or female by judging them to be so, perhaps in the way that one can make it true that one's pet cat is called 'Fox' by giving it that name. Supposing that a cat is called 'Fox' if and only if the cat's owner calls it 'Fox', this is well explained by performative utterances determining, in certain circumstances, the proper names of things. Without such order-of-determination claims, these biconditionals are quite mysterious: it seems that to refrain from claiming that there is an order of determination in a response-dependence biconditional is to refrain from accepting the most basic and plausible kind of explanation for that biconditional's truth. It is not plausible that the relation between the judgments of an ideal observer and the state of affairs of which she is an ideal observer is merely a coincidence. Aesthetic Response-Dependence is best explained by 1 or 2. I will now further defend 2 as the better of the two explanations.

In order to defend this answer to the order of determination question, it will be necessary to claim, as Wright puts it, that the extensions of predicates such as ‘aesthetically valuable’ and ‘beautiful’ are, at least in the case of art, determined independently of our ideal aesthetic experiences and judgments, which merely reflect this extension. If this can be done successfully, then my Hume-inspired Response-Dependence about aesthetic values in art can be regarded as a form of Aesthetic Objectivism: the view that works of art have objective aesthetic values, which in the right conditions we are able to detect.

### 3.4.3 Hume on the Detection of Aesthetic Values in Art

Although Hume may or may not have shared my objectivist take on aesthetic Response-Dependence, further details of his account may offer some assistance in defending my own. It might seem that Hume is best understood as defending something like 1 (Aesthetic Subjectivism), since he focuses on characterising ideal circumstances and does not say much to suggest that there is anything independent of the responses of a critic in ideal circumstances that gives a work its aesthetic values. On the other hand, the circumstance he puts the most emphasis on is the alleged ability for ideal critics to *detect* minute details in works of art.

Hume is inspired by an example in which wine tasters claim to detect the taste of iron and leather in a particular wine. Their audience is sceptical, but when the barrel is drained, they discover an iron key attached to a leather key fob.<sup>94</sup> It is obvious that the judgments of wine tasters cannot make it the case that there is a key in a barrel. Similarly, it seems that Hume would say that the judgments of critics in ideal circumstances do not make it the case that a

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<sup>94</sup> HUME 1985, pp. 234-5.

work of art is aesthetically valuable. Their judgments or sentiments are caused by the work's values or the properties that constitute them.

If the sentiments of critics in ideal circumstances were supposed to constitute the beauty of objects, then it seems that the characteristics of the ideal critic would not be limited to those conducive to maximally objective perception and interpretation. If their sentiments made works of art beautiful, as opposed to the beauty of works of art causing their sentiments, then we might expect Hume to describe ideal critics as people with wild imaginations or other characteristics that do not necessarily involve the removal of barriers between object and observer.

James Shelley, however, suggests that we should interpret the case of the winetasters as illustrating that there are two stages to aesthetic evaluation: a perceptual stage in which the descriptive features of the object (such as the presence of iron in the wine) are discerned; and an affective stage in which one has a sentimental reaction to what one perceives. If this, as Shelley claims, is implied in Hume's essay, then perhaps Hume's comparison of the detection of iron or leather in wine with the detection of the features of art works should not be interpreted as suggesting that ideal judges detect the values of art, rather than merely the descriptive properties of art objects. So it is not obvious, and indeed is disputed, whether Hume would claim that ideal critics reflect objective values in works of art or whether the joint verdict of their evaluations makes it the case that works have whatever values they have. I do not aim in this dissertation to settle this matter, but I do aim to propose a plausible theory of the aesthetic values of art, and in doing so I will defend the claim that ideal critics reflect and do not determine the values of art.

Railton usefully suggests a clarification of the relationship of Hume's ideal critic to works of art, with reference to the relationship between clocks and time.<sup>95</sup> Clocks often reliably indicate what the time is, and this does not lead us to suppose that clocks constitute time itself; similarly, ideal critics in ideal conditions would act as reliable indicators of the dispositions of works of art, without giving works those dispositions. If ideal circumstances are those in which our aesthetic experiences reliably indicate the aesthetic values of art works, the Response-Dependence relationship is akin to the relationship between clocks and time itself:

*Being a true standard of time [in the sense of corresponding perfectly with solar time at a fixed location on the globe] is clearly not the same as constituting time.<sup>96</sup>*

Rather than constituting time, clocks generally track the time. Ideally, a clock will do this with high accuracy. Railton appears to be interpreting Hume as characterising ideal critics as trackers of aesthetic value, analogous to an accurate clock. It seems possible, then, that Hume understood the ideal critic to be a detector of beauty, but what matters for present purposes is whether that would be the right answer to give to the order of determination question. Whatever Hume's answer is, he employs the notion of 'natural fit' which seems to have some relevance here, and I will now look at it more closely.

### 3.4.4 Natural Fit

Hume writes about a *natural fit* between objects and certain responses. A good poem, for example, is "calculated to please" those who observe it.<sup>97</sup> The poem is like a key which

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<sup>95</sup> RAILTON 2001, p. 69.

<sup>96</sup> RAILTON 2001, p. 69.

unlocks the appropriate response. Perhaps another way of putting this is to say that objects merit certain responses. However, Hume's naturalistic approach to aesthetic normativity seems to be in contrast to an approach based on merit, according to which there is some *sui generis* property which merits certain responses.

The latter is a view attributed to David Wiggins, who defends a kind of Response-Dependence about values according to which the following biconditional holds:

*...x is good if and only if x is the sort of thing that calls forth or makes appropriate a certain sentiment of approbation given the range of propensities we have to respond in this or that way...<sup>98</sup>*

The 'calling forth or making appropriate' element of Wiggins' view seems to make the above a claim about x's goodness involving its meriting of certain responses. This is in contrast to the view that, say, x is good if and only if in certain circumstances one would respond in a certain way (perhaps with a certain sentiment of approbation). The latter is a view about goodness and other values as involving the capacity to cause certain responses rather than others, and not a view about goodness being the meriting of certain responses over others. This more naturalistic, causal Response-Dependence, which compares values to secondary qualities in order to demonstrate that there is nothing 'queer' about them (as Mackie would put it; see §6.1), may be easier to defend.

Schellekens criticises attempts by Wiggins and Frank Sibley to improve upon the basic claim that aesthetic values are like secondary qualities.<sup>99</sup> She claims that concepts of merit or

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<sup>97</sup> HUME 1985, p. 228.

<sup>98</sup> WIGGINS, David. A sensible subjectivism? In WIGGINS, David. *Needs, values, truth: Essays in the philosophy of value*. Clarendon Press, 1998: pp. 185-214; p. 206.

appropriateness add nothing more than a normative-seeming gloss on such theories; that is, such views seem to take a naturalistic Response-Dependence and throw in words like ‘merit’ to make the view seem to imply more normativity than it in fact does. She claims that it remains unexplained on a Response-Dependence view how certain aesthetic responses are, and others are not, justified.<sup>100</sup> But I will argue that a naturalistic Response-Dependence account can explain this.

Hume might, in speaking of a natural fit between beauty and sentiment, be implying that this is a meriting relationship. He does talk of beauty maintaining an “authority over the minds of men” which might be interpreted as beauty meriting or perhaps prescribing certain responses, in a way that can be difficult to explain.<sup>101</sup>

In §6.1.1 I argue that, whatever Hume’s view, on the account I defend aesthetic values need not be interpreted as prescriptive. Hume may have agreed with this, as it seems that his ‘natural fit’ may be merely a causal relationship rather than a normative relationship:

*...beauties ...are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments...*<sup>102</sup>

*...Though it be certain, that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external; it must be allowed, that there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings.*<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See SIBLEY, Frank. Objectivity and Aesthetics. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary volume 42, 1968: 31-54.

<sup>100</sup> SCHELLEKENS 2006, p. 171.

<sup>101</sup> HUME 1985, p. 233.

<sup>102</sup> HUME 1985, p. 233.

<sup>103</sup> HUME 1985, p. 235.

Hume may mean that beauty is simply the capacity for an object's properties to cause us to respond with agreeable sentiments. Such a view may be preferable to a theory involving merit, insofar as it succeeds in giving a naturalistic explanation of value which can explain the same things as can a concept of merit: namely, the possibility of error and expertise in aesthetic evaluations of art. As Schellekens has argued, it is unclear what a concept of meriting can add to a Response-Dependence account of aesthetic values; indeed, it seems that such a concept makes a naturalistic explanation of value more difficult, without providing any further explanation as to what it is for a work to be aesthetically valuable.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.4.5 Human Sensibilities

The natural fit in Hume's account seems implicitly to be between certain properties and human sensibilities. Ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience are conducive to the manifestation of the aesthetic capacities of a work as well as dispositions which are given to us by human nature. In being response-dependent, aesthetic value concepts are correctly applied to works of art depending on the dispositions of works to produce aesthetic experiences, and dispositions of observers to undergo these experiences in response to the works.

Certain properties are naturally fitted to please human beings, who have evolved to find them enjoyable, and art is the attempt to infuse objects with some such properties, specifically those conducive to valuable aesthetic experience. The ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience include the possession of all of the capacities a person needs to make them sensitive to the natural fit between the properties of art works and human

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<sup>104</sup> SCHELLEKENS, Elisabeth. Towards a reasonable objectivism for aesthetic judgements. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 46:2, 2006: 163-177.

sensibilities. In other words, the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of a work are the manifestation conditions for its aesthetic values.

Our propensity to respond to works in certain ways partly determines their values, but this is different from responses themselves determining values. The dispositions of ideal aesthetic experiencers to find aesthetic experiences of a work rewarding and therefore judge the work to be aesthetically valuable can be said to determine the work's aesthetic values. But this is not the same as their experiences or judgments themselves determining the work's value; for that to be the case, the responses of an ideal aesthetic experiencer would have to determine her propensity to respond in certain ways, or determine the work's propensity to produce these responses.

For example, suppose that people are generally disposed—when in a position to pay close attention and when not subject to certain biases, and so on—to find many of the paintings of Van Gogh to be beautiful. In a sense, the paintings will thus be beautiful because people are generally disposed to find certain features of the painting to be beautiful. In other words, our tendency to find certain features of the paintings beautiful (in appropriate circumstances) will make it the case that those features make the paintings beautiful. But our judgments about the paintings will not make them beautiful, and nor will our aesthetic experiences; rather, our propensity to respond to certain features the paintings with experiences of a certain sort will render the paintings beautiful in virtue of possessing those features, and this may lead us to form certain aesthetic value judgments about the paintings.

Ideal aesthetic experiences do not determine the capacity for humans to have valuable aesthetic experiences of art, or the capacity for art to produce such experiences. What

determines these things is the relation between the properties of art works and human sensibilities. This appears to be what Hume is saying when he characterises beauty as that which would please critics in ideal circumstances. The features of a work and their relationship to human sensibilities constitute the aesthetic values of the work.

The relationship between the properties of art works and human sensibilities constitute a 'natural fit' in a sense that Hume would have been unaware of: we have evolved as a species to find the experience of certain features of objects to be not only enjoyable but deeply rewarding in their engagement of our imagination and understanding. Culture too influences our enjoyment of art; in chapter 5 I consider the extent to which cultural influences interfere with or enable the proper appreciation of art. Art works at their best are the infusion of objects, be they physical artefacts or whatever else can be a work of art, with features which human beings have the propensity to find the experience of to be rewarding. These features are naturally fitted to excite human sensibilities, partly because the adaptation of human sensibilities to the environment through natural selection has resulted in this rewarding aesthetic sensitivity to objects. The standard of taste is derived from this natural fit between sensible properties and human sensibilities.

The uniformity of human nature is not total, but nor are individuals different enough that aesthetic values have a fine-grained relativity to individual subjects; I argue for this in chapter 5. Cases in which the same work can be experienced as having an aesthetic value only by some ideal aesthetic experiencers may occur if we are sufficiently different, but in many cases such differences are exaggerated or imagined and such aesthetic disputes are in fact due to the cognitive shortcomings which result from basing one's judgments on non-ideal experiences of a work. I will now clarify that the answer to the order of determination

question that I have been defending leads to a dispositional analysis of aesthetic values in art.

### 3.5 Dispositionalism

On my account, responses under ideal circumstances are reliable indications of the aesthetic values of art works, and do not give a work its aesthetic values, however, the values of the experiences offered by the work determine that the properties giving rise to them constitute the work's aesthetic values (I defend this latter claim in chapter 4). Ideal aesthetic experiencers prefer works because of their objective aesthetic values, but they are only objectively aesthetically valuable because they can give rise to the aesthetic experiences on which ideal aesthetic experiencers base their aesthetic value judgments—experiences which are themselves valuable.

A critic outside the ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of a work will have less success, if any, in reflecting the qualities of the work. That does not necessarily mean that the aesthetic experiences they have of the work will be of less value, but as I explained in §3.3.1, ideal circumstances should be defined in relation to the most potent sources of valuable aesthetic experience (masterpieces), so experiencing a work in ideal circumstances is more likely to give one access to the most valuable aesthetic experiences.

Consider a view that I have already mentioned which is analogous to the analysis of aesthetic values I have been outlining. Take Response-Dependence about colour to be the view that, roughly, an object *O* has colour *C* if and only if an observer in normal circumstances would experience *O* as having *C*.

Now suppose that the order of determination in this biconditional is such that an observer in normal circumstances would experience O as having C because O has C. In other words, objects normally look red because they are red. *Colour Dispositionalism* seems to capture this view: if O is C if and only if O normally looks C, and furthermore it looks C because it is, it seems that C might be a disposition to look C in normal circumstances.<sup>105</sup> If such an order of determination in a Response-Dependence theory of colour leads to Colour Dispositionalism, it would seem that the claim about the order of determination in Aesthetic Response-Dependence may imply Aesthetic Dispositionalism, which I will now describe.

### 3.5.1 Aesthetic Dispositionalism

Hume's account could be interpreted as implying that aesthetic values are dispositions to produce aesthetic sentiments, which form the basis of aesthetic value judgments. This is because he defends an ideal observer theory according to which a work of art is beautiful if and only if an ideal observer in ideal conditions would judge it to be beautiful based on her sentimental responses. The order of determination in this account may or may not be such that the ideal observer detects beauty, which would therefore seem to be constituted by features of the work which dispose it to cause aesthetic sentiments in ideal circumstances. My account at least has this basic structure, but it implies the more general claim that aesthetic values are dispositions or capacities to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of a given work of art. This can include, but is not limited to, the aesthetic value of beauty disposing a work to cause ideal aesthetic experiencers to respond in a sentimental or emotional way.

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<sup>105</sup> Colour Dispositionalism is controversial, but for a defence see LEVIN, Janet. Dispositional theories of color and the claims of common sense. *Philosophical Studies*, 100:2, 2000: 151-174.

Levinson claims that a work of art is aesthetically valuable in virtue of possessing certain capacities or dispositions which we may identify as its aesthetic properties or values:

*[An aesthetic property is] a disposition to afford a certain global impression to adequately positioned perceivers...<sup>106</sup>*

*Clearly the objectivity for aesthetic properties defended in this essay is not one that accords them a transcendent status, independent of human reactions. What has been defended is rather objectivity as contingent but stable intersubjective convergence in judgments among qualified perceivers.<sup>107</sup>*

Insofar as an ideal aesthetic experiencer would experience a work in a certain way, such a critic is disposed to respond in this way, and the work is disposed to prompt the manifestation of this disposition on the part of the critic. In other words, the work is disposed to produce certain experiences in ideal circumstances, and a critic in ideal circumstances is disposed to prompt the manifestation of these dispositions of the work. If this dispositional analysis of my Humean Response-Dependence account is correct, the ideal aesthetic experiencer can be characterised as a detector rather than a projector of the aesthetic values of works of art, since she is best placed to respond in ways that reflect the dispositions possessed by a work.

Settling the Metaphysics of dispositions is of course beyond the scope of this dissertation, but insofar as the type of objectivist Response-Dependence I wish to endorse does imply

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<sup>106</sup> LEVINSON, Jerrold. Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative Force, and Differences of Sensibility. In BRADY, Emily, and LEVINSON, Jerrold (eds.) *Aesthetic concepts: Essays after Sibley*, 2001; p. 66.

<sup>107</sup> LEVINSON 2001, p. 80.

that aesthetic values are dispositions realised by the properties of works of art, I must acknowledge certain relevant controversies in the Metaphysics literature. I will now defend my Humean account from a type of objection which is widely discussed in the literature on dispositions in general.

### 3.6 Anti-Dispositionalism

An objection to Response-Dependence about colour has been extended to Response-Dependence theories of aesthetic value, and to introduce the objection I will first consider it in relation to the above analysis of colour. The construal of colour as a disposition of objects seems to make the objection vulnerable to responses offered in the literature on the Metaphysics of dispositions.

James Shelley and Michael Watkins give the example of a shy chameleon who changes from green to white whenever light sufficient for it to be seen strikes its skin, whereas in the dark the chameleon remains green. It might seem that Response-Dependence about colour cannot say that the chameleon is green in the dark, since were a normal observer in normal conditions to see the chameleon it would look white, because normal conditions would involve light sufficient for the chameleon to be seen, and this would cause the chameleon to turn white.<sup>108</sup>

Supposing not only that colour concepts are Response-Dependent, but also that colours themselves are dispositions, the shy chameleon case can, it seems, be interpreted in terms of what has been called a *finkish disposition* or a *fink*: a disposition where the conditions for an object acquiring or losing the disposition are the same as the conditions for the

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<sup>108</sup> WATKINS, Michael, and SHELLEY, James. Response-dependence about aesthetic value. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 93:3, 2012: 338-352; p. 341.

manifestation of the disposition.<sup>109</sup> For example, one might invent a type of glass microphysically identical to the usual fragile kind, except that it possesses an intrinsic fink which is activated by anything which might cause the glass to break. If one, say, hits the glass with a hammer, the fink activates instantaneously and the glass ceases to be fragile and therefore does not break.

In the chameleon case, a colour dispositionalist may say that the chameleon is disposed to appear green (in normal circumstances), and yet its shyness acts as a fink which causes it to lose its green disposition as soon as light reaches it. This does pose a problem for a simple conditional analysis of colour dispositions: it seems in the example that the chameleon is green at night, but were a normal observer in normal conditions to look at the chameleon it would appear white; it is therefore false that an object is green if and only if it would appear green to a normal observer in normal conditions. But there are more sophisticated conditional analyses of dispositions available which deal with finkish cases.

### 3.6.1 Ceteris Paribus Clauses

One strategy for supplying a conditional analysis of dispositions which deals with finkish cases is to supply a *ceteris paribus* clause: for instance, an object is disposed to appear green in daylight if and only if it would appear green in daylight, *ceteris paribus* (or *all other things being equal*).<sup>110</sup> The clause would need to say more than 'except in cases where it would not appear green', as otherwise the analysis of colour would be vacuous, as follows: an object is disposed to appear green in daylight if and only if it would appear green in daylight

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<sup>109</sup> See, for example, BIRD, Alexander. Dispositions and antidotes. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 48:191, 1998: 227-234.

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, STEINBERG, Jesse R. Dispositions and subjunctives. *Philosophical studies*, 148:3, 2010: 323-341.

in the conditions in which it would appear green in daylight.<sup>111</sup> But as Jesse Steinberg argues, *ceteris paribus* clauses do not lend themselves to that analysis: they merely imply that there is a disjunction of circumstances which are not occurring.<sup>112</sup> Steinberg argues that this is commonplace in science and everyday life and that we need to make such claims in order to make predictions that are likely to be accurate.<sup>113</sup>

For example, human behaviour is to some extent predictable on the basis of claims supported by evidence in experimental psychology and related sciences, claims which imply a *ceteris paribus* clause, for example the claim that physical exercise is an effective treatment for depression.<sup>114</sup> For instance it is quite possible that exercise in the form of regularly losing in boxing matches to one's former school bullies would worsen one's depression. So the informative, interesting claim that exercise is an effective treatment for depression must be qualified with something like a *ceteris paribus* clause, ruling out such cases in which exercise would be counter-productive or ineffective.

Furthermore, *ceteris paribus* clauses may not be, and need not be, fully articulated: we can make accurate predictions on the basis of *ceteris paribus* claims without enumerating all of the circumstances that they must rule out.<sup>115</sup> For example it seems that there is no need for doctors or sufferers from depression to consider cases of misery-inducing boxing when considering whether exercise in general, or as a rule-of-thumb, is an appropriate treatment for depression.

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<sup>111</sup> STEINBERG 2010, p. 327.

<sup>112</sup> STEINBERG 2010, p. 329.

<sup>113</sup> STEINBERG 2010, p. 331.

<sup>114</sup> See RIMER, Jane, et al. Exercise for depression. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*, 7, 2012.

<sup>115</sup> STEINBERG 2010, pp. 239-40.

I find this method of responding to cases of interference, such as finkish cases, quite plausible, but it is controversial and subject to a debate that I can only briefly refer to here. Other attempts to defend a simple conditional analysis of dispositions are available.<sup>116</sup> It is beyond the scope of this dissertation for me to go into much more detail about forms of Dispositionalism or about how to deal with finkish dispositions or other interference cases, but I will now consider Watkins and Shelley's concerns about Aesthetic Response-Dependence which are analogous to the shy chameleon case.

### 3.6.2 Dealing with Finks

Watkins and Shelley translate their objection to Colour Response-Dependence into two attempts to refute Response-Dependence theories of aesthetic value. The aesthetic examples they suggest are that of an angel who intervenes to prevent anyone from seeing one of Picasso's masterpieces, and of a type of yellow paint used by Da Vinci which instantly kills anyone who is about to observe it.<sup>117</sup> The worry is that if a painting by Picasso or Da Vinci is aesthetically valuable if and only if it would be experienced as such by an ideal observer, then its being unobservable in practice is sufficient to prevent it from being aesthetically valuable. This might have happened with, say, *Guernica* or *The Last Supper*, which we hail as masterpieces, and so it seems that works of art must not be aesthetically valuable in virtue of being disposed to produce certain responses. I will now offer two responses and apply them to each of these cases, and these responses will be available for many other attempts to provide counterexamples to Aesthetic Dispositionalism or Aesthetic Response-Dependence.

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<sup>116</sup> See, for example, CONTESSA, Gabriele. Dispositions and interferences. *Philosophical studies*, 165:2, 2013: 401-419.

<sup>117</sup> WATKINS & SHELLEY 2012, pp. 341-2.

The first available response to Shelley and Watkins is as follows. Perhaps it can be taken for granted that ideal circumstances do not permit being prevented from seeing things by a miracle or by death. If a painting cannot be seen at all because any attempts to observe it will result in death, then unless it is some sort of homicidal performance piece, the painting may be as beautiful as it would seem to an ideal aesthetic experiencer were the painting comprised of normal yellow paint rather than killer yellow paint.

Supposing that *The Last Supper* can have the aesthetic dispositions that it does, with the addition of a disposition to kill potential observers of it before they can observe it, it seems that this is a finkish case. That is, partly in virtue of the use of yellow paint, the work is disposed to produce worthwhile aesthetic experiences in certain observational conditions, but the very same yellow paint will in the very same observational conditions remove the work's aesthetic capacities—construed as relational properties to the responses of relevant observers—by making the work unobservable.

The Da Vinci case is analogous to glass containing a finkish disposition which, when the glass is hit with a hammer, renders the glass unbreakable and therefore takes away the disposition of fragility. One can analyse the fragility of such a substance by saying that it would break if (for example) hit by a hammer, *ceteris paribus*, where this implies (among other things) that this would occur were it not for the finkish disposition which would, under such circumstances, remove the fragility of the glass. The *ceteris paribus* clause will also imply that, for example, nor would the fragile glass break if the chosen hammer were made of a very soft substance or if an angel changed the laws of physics, and so on.

By making this first kind of response I can agree with Shelley and Watkins' assumption that Da Vinci's painting is a good one, and I can offer my preferred conditional analysis of its

aesthetic values-as-capacities, according to which ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience preclude being instantaneously killed by the work of art in question. The work is beautiful because were an ideal aesthetic experiencer to observe it they would find it to be so, even though this cannot occur because nobody could survive viewing the killer yellow paint.

A second available response is, at least in the Da Vinci case, to bite the bullet and say that the painting lacks aesthetic value. Whereas it does seem that a chameleon can be green even though the lights are currently off, it does not seem very plausible that something permanently unobservable to the human eye could really be a great piece of *visual* art. Da Vinci may have applied his technique with great skill and inspiration and produced something that, were it different in just one respect, would be as great as *The Last Supper*. But by hypothesis he didn't do that: what he did do was apply, albeit with great precision, a type of paint that causes one to die before they can see it.

If one were to design a sophisticated machine with a built-in 'electro-fink' which means that whenever one attempts to turn on the machine it is prevented from working, then one would plausibly have gone to great lengths to design a useless machine. Similarly, it seems that Da Vinci's killer painting might be a useless work of art: that is, one that is devoid of aesthetic value. Had the killer yellow paint been used by accident this might make a difference, in which case I think the case would be similar to the Picasso one in which, contrary to the artist's intentions, the work becomes unobservable. I will now return to that type of case.

### 3.6.3 Dealing with Masks

Picasso's painting in the above case has no finkish disposition to prevent one from seeing it; rather, an angel intervenes to prevent it from being seen. This type of interference has been termed an *antidote* or (as I prefer) a *mask*.<sup>118</sup> One might argue that the case of killer yellow paint is also a mask rather than a fink, in which case the remarks in the present section will be applicable to that case as well, and the previous section will remain applicable to finkish cases.

If an object made of fragile glass is packaged so that it does not break when struck with a hammer, it seems that the glass itself has not ceased to be fragile; its fragility has been masked. Similarly, the Picasso painting in Shelley and Watkins' above example is, perhaps, exactly as beautiful as it would be were the angel to stop masking it from the gaze of potential observers. The first response I mentioned, according to which ideal circumstances imply a *ceteris paribus* clause sufficient to render finkish cases irrelevant, is also available to deal with these extrinsic cases where the dispositions of the object remain present but are masked so as to prevent them from manifesting. Ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience can be taken to imply that there is no angel masking the manifestation of the work's aesthetic capacities, nor any other sort of abnormal circumstance that would interfere with the manifestation, both of a work's capacities to please human aesthetic sensibilities in ideal circumstances, and of the dispositions comprising such sensibilities.

In the Picasso case, the second response is also available again. Perhaps Picasso's painting, again, would just be a case of bad or valueless art, albeit produced with great effort by a genius. If an artist is not able to communicate with his audience due to some external

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<sup>118</sup> See, for example, EVERETT, Anthony. Intrinsic finks, masks, and mimics. *Erkenntnis*, 71:2, 2009: 191-203.

circumstance, perhaps the artist will fail, blamelessly, to make great art. Whether Response-Dependence commits me to *ceteris paribus* clauses, or to the view that these tricky cases are ones in which what might have been great works are simply ruined, it seems that Shelley and Watkins have not posed a serious challenge to Response-Dependence. Insofar as the notion of a disposition is coherent and the dispositional analysis of certain properties is viable, which I can only assume for the purposes of this dissertation, it seems that a dispositional analysis of aesthetic values in art can at least survive the objections I have considered thus far. But one might worry that at least the first proposed response to these cases, according to which ideal circumstances imply some kind of *ceteris paribus* clause, is rather *ad hoc*. I will now address this concern.

### 3.6.4 Ideal Circumstances Revisited

I have suggested that an appeal to normal or ideal circumstances may imply a *ceteris paribus* clause such that they rule out interferences such as finks and masks. One might argue that defining ideal circumstances so that they rule out all interferences renders a Response-Dependence account of aesthetic values vacuous, as I discussed in §3.4. But this is just to misunderstand the view: it is not that ideal circumstances rule out all interferences *de dicto*, just as one might desire to eat everything on a menu whatever it might be. Rather, as Pettit explains, there is a discounting practice relevant to our aesthetic value concepts, according to which circumstances are ideal for the experience of a work's aesthetic values when all interferences *de re* are absent: that is, there are no masks, no finks, and so on.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> PETTIT 1993, p. 603.

Pettit suggests that normal conditions in a Response-Dependence analysis of redness can be defined as follows:

*...in a higher-level way as those conditions, whatever they are, which survive the relevant discounting practice. Under this definition of normal conditions, the biconditional tells us something substantial. It does not say that something is red if and only if it looks red in conditions which ensure that red things look red; it says that something is red if and only if it answers in a certain way to the sensations and practices of those who use the concept. But what the biconditional tells us is still plausibly a priori. Knowledge of the practices current among those who use the concept is sufficient to give knowledge of the truth of the proposition; we do not have to know in detail about which conditions actually pass the discounting test.<sup>120</sup>*

Pettit is claiming here that we can know, for example, that: something falls under the concept 'red' "if and only if it answers in a certain way to the sensations and practices of those who use the concept." We can know this without having extensive empirical information about those sensations and practices, or about the 'certain way' in question.

What Pettit and I endorse here is the view that it is not necessary to answer impossible questions about the exact details of an indefinite disjunction of relevant or irrelevant circumstances to the application of a concept, in order to have said something substantive about the concept. This 'whatever it takes' approach to articulating ideal circumstances in a Response-Dependence analysis of a concept does not render the analysis vacuous. Consider the following analogy.

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<sup>120</sup> PETTIT 1993, p. 603.

We can know that exercise is generally good for patients with depression without knowing that in some particular circumstances exercise can worsen depression. Similarly, we can know that redness is connected to human propensities to have experiences as of redness in normal circumstances, without being able to give a complete articulation of what normal circumstances include or exclude. All we need to say is that normal circumstances are those that will survive the relevant discounting practice.

However long the list of circumstances that do or do not pass the relevant discounting practice might be, the account can remain informative. If I desire *de re* to eat everything on a menu, this says something about the sorts of foods that I directly desire, whereas if I only desire *de dicto* to eat everything on the menu, this merely suggests that I have a menu fetish. In both cases, I will desire to eat something if and only if it is on the menu, but only in the latter case does this fail to impart information about what food I would properly appreciate. That a critic in ideal circumstances would enjoy a work provides us with information about how the properties of that work relate to human sensibilities. It does not merely tell us that a work is good if and if it would seem good in the circumstances in which good works seem good.

We can make claims such as the following: an object is red if and only if it looks red in circumstances which include A, B, C etc. and preclude X, Y, Z etc. 'Etc.' here is not a failure to make substantive and accurate claims about a concept; it is the acknowledgement that no mortal could ever finish writing such a list when it is reflective of the whole environment and the intricate details of how we have evolved to respond to it. My stance here when applied to Aesthetic Response-Dependence may have something in common with

Wittgenstein's claim that "to describe what [aesthetic appreciation] consists in we would have to describe the whole environment".<sup>121</sup>

To recap, it seems the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of an art work can be defined in a higher-level way such that they rule out interferences such as finks and masks. This should be read in a *de re* sense: the circumstances rule out *interferences X, Y, Z and so on*, and not just *whatever happens to interfere*. On the account of aesthetic values in art that I am developing, according to which they are dispositions picked out by response-dependent concepts, ideal circumstances can be taken to imply the absence of interferences such as finks and masks, and this may be possible without rendering the account vacuous and without requiring the enumeration of all possible interferences.

Furthermore, Ideal circumstances involve abilities of epistemic objectivity conducive to the appreciation of masterpieces as identified by independent measures including the test of time. Being in an ideal epistemic relation to the properties of a work of art on this account can imply the absence of a great many interferences, not merely because they prevent the experience of W as having V, but because they are inconsistent with being in a state of epistemic objectivity conducive to the appreciation of masterpieces.

Another important clarification here is that I am not claiming that ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience give one the ability to detect interferences such as finks and masks. Rather, I am claiming that such circumstances, which involve both traits on the part of the critic and external circumstances such as lighting conditions and so on, will preclude interferences such as finks and masks. If such an interference is present when one

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<sup>121</sup> WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 1966: 7.

experiences a work of art, then one will not be in the ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of that work. Unlike the ideal circumstances for aesthetic judgment, the ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of a work are likely to be obtainable, and need not involve the ability to detect metaphysical interferences.

### 3.7 Conclusions

In this chapter I have begun to develop a revision of Hume's Response-Dependence theory of aesthetic values in art. Like Hume I regard the responses of critics in ideal circumstances as an indication of a work's aesthetic values. Circumstances are ideal insofar as they involve epistemic objectivity and allow one to appreciate what the tests of time, cross-cultural and cross-individual appeal would suggest are masterpieces of art. Ideal circumstances are not necessary for one to have valuable aesthetic experiences caused by works of art, but such experiences are similar to knowledge or moral behaviour in that they can be a matter of luck or they can be a matter of the application of reliable standards, and ideal circumstances provide such a standard.

Ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience allow one to detect the capacities a work has to provide valuable aesthetic experiences for human beings, and this is why it is the case that a work is valuable if and only if an ideal aesthetic experiencer would find it to be so. A work's aesthetic capacities are based on the natural fit between human sensibilities and salient properties such that, just as we find sugar to be sweet, we find good art to have features that we naturally find rewarding. In the next chapter I will explain and defend in greater detail the notion that it is the values of these appreciative experiences that are the source of the values of works of art, even though, as I have claimed, we detect rather than make it the case that a work is aesthetically valuable.

## 4. Aesthetic Value Empiricism

### 4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I argue that the aesthetic values of works of art are instrumental values, and that the values of aesthetic experience are non-aesthetic values. Works are aesthetically valuable insofar as they are instrumental to experiences which are both aesthetic and valuable, but not themselves necessarily aesthetically valuable. Instead, their value where positive is pleasure, and where negative is displeasure.

I begin by summarising the two main claims I have made so far: that the aesthetic values of art works fall under response-dependent concepts and that they are ontologically objective. I then introduce Aesthetic Value Empiricism, the view that works of art are aesthetically valuable because the aesthetic experiences they are apt to produce are themselves valuable. I explain how this is consistent with these previous claims, and consider what sorts of value aesthetic experiences might have in virtue of which the art works with the capacity to produce them in ideal circumstances will themselves be aesthetically valuable.

I oppose what I refer to as 'the Object Theory': the view that the valence of aesthetic experiences of an art work is determined by the antecedent aesthetic values of the work. I defend Aesthetic Value Empiricism from the objection that it implies a heresy: that something other than a work of art could have the same values as the work by being apt to produce a similar response. I consider this objection and the response I give to it in relation to various cases in which the activity of the imagination seems to bestow value upon a work. I clarify that on my account the hedonic values of aesthetic experiences are

primary in the constitution of the aesthetic values of works of art, but are not themselves necessarily aesthetic values. I defend my hedonistic theory of the value of aesthetic experiences from supposed counterexamples including works of Horror and Tragedy. I conclude that the element of Aesthetic Value Empiricism in my account of aesthetic values in art does not imply the aforementioned heresy and does explain what is good about good art (and bad about bad art) better than the Object Theory can.

#### 4.1 Aesthetic Value Empiricism

The claim that this chapter defends is that the aesthetic values of works of art *qua* objects—their *object values*, as it were—depend on *experience values*: the values of aesthetic experiences offered by a work. Works of art are objects with properties, and we have experiences of works of art. To the extent that works of art can have aesthetic values, this must have something to do with at least some of the properties of said works. But the experiences we have of the properties of works of art are also relevant to the aesthetic values of works of art. At the very least, even if aesthetic values of works are entirely determined by properties of art objects, experiences of works of art are the means by which we reap the aesthetic values of works of art: the function of art objects is to produce certain experiences.

The account I have been defending so far can be summarised by the following two claims:

*Aesthetic Response-Dependence*: An art work *W* has aesthetic value *V* if and only if an ideal aesthetic experiencer *IE* would experience *W* as having *V*.

*Aesthetic Objectivism*: *IE* would experience *W* as having *V* because *W* has *V*.

In this chapter I explain that although aesthetic values determine valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances, art objects are only valuable in virtue of the values of these experiences. That is, valuable aesthetic experiences are not valuable because they are of aesthetic values; rather, aesthetic values are values because the experiences they are apt to produce are themselves valuable.

This is known as *Aesthetic Value Empiricism*: the view that the aesthetic values of objects are instrumental values to produce valuable experiences, with the values of the experiences being primary in the constitution of the values of the objects.<sup>122</sup> In this chapter I defend this claim for aesthetic values in art and explain how it is consistent with Aesthetic Response-Dependence and Aesthetic Objectivism.

It may seem that aesthetic values cannot be objective features of objects if they are dependent on our responses to them, but I argue that the standard of taste is merely a tool for resolving disputes about an object's aesthetic values; it can tell us about aesthetic values just as a tape-measure can tell us about length without being what gives an object its length. In virtue of *being* 10 centimetres long, an object will be *found to be* this long when held up against an accurate tape-measure. In virtue of having the capacity to produce valuable aesthetic experiences for human persons in ideal circumstances, we will find that aesthetic evaluations formed in those circumstances reflect those objective aesthetic capacities, those capacities being what is aesthetically valuable in works of art.

As I will continue to explain, aesthetic properties are properties of objects in virtue of which those objects are apt to provide us with aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic values are the

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<sup>122</sup> SHELLEY, James. Against Value Empiricism in Aesthetics. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88.4 (2010): 707-720.

propensities of objects to provide us with positively or negatively valenced aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience. Thick aesthetic values such as elegance are descriptive properties of objects apt to produce pleasurable (or displeasurable) aesthetic experiences in ideal experiential circumstances. Thin aesthetic values such as beauty are realised by properties which may be picked out by thick aesthetic value concepts. For example, an elegant vase is one which has a certain kind of descriptive property which disposes the vase to produce positively valuable aesthetic experiences of that property. This renders the property a beauty-making feature of the object. The presence of certain thick aesthetic values entails an object's thin aesthetic values. For example a vase may be beautiful because it is elegant. I will now further explain Aesthetic Value Empiricism.=

#### 4.1.1 Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism

To clarify the compatibility of Aesthetic Objectivism and Value Empiricism, it is useful to see these views as answering two separate questions of the order of determination, corresponding to two distinct but compatible biconditionals:

1. Suppose that 'A if and only if B', where B states that art work W has aesthetic value V, and A states that the aesthetic experiences an ideal aesthetic experiencer would have of W are themselves valuable in the relevant ways and to the corresponding degrees. What is the order of determination between A and B?
2. Suppose that 'B if and only if C', where B states that art work W has aesthetic value V, and C states that an ideal aesthetic experiencer

would experience W as having V. What is the order of determination between B and C?

1 is, at present, somewhat vague, and in this chapter I will explain it in detail. 1 is, however, clearly not the same as 2, and it is consistent to say that the suppositions in both 1 and 2 are true, and that A makes it the case that B which makes it the case that C. Aesthetic values are discoverable dispositions of objects, not things we project onto objects. But they are only values because of how good or bad it is to experience them.

Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism can be understood as the conjunction of the following two claims:

*Aesthetic Value Empiricism:* A work of art is aesthetically valuable because of the values of the aesthetic experiences it would produce for critics in circumstances ideal for aesthetic experience.

*Objectivist Aesthetic Response-Dependence:* The aesthetic experiences of a work of art had by critics in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience are experiences of what is aesthetically valuable in that work.

The aesthetic values of art are only values because they are instrumental to valuable aesthetic experiences. Some of the properties of a work may constitute aesthetic values *because* the aesthetic experiences which these properties of the work are apt to produce are themselves valuable. So *the values of* aesthetic experiences determine the aesthetic values of art works. This is distinct from aesthetic experiences determining aesthetic values, and consistent with aesthetic values determining aesthetic experiences. Ideal aesthetic experiencers would have valuable aesthetic experiences of W *because* some of the

properties of W constitute aesthetic values *because* aesthetic experiences which these properties of W are apt to produce are themselves valuable. Ideal aesthetic experiencers reflect the extension of predicates like 'beauty', that extension being independently determined by the dispositions of the object to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances.

The order of determination in 1 may be such that A because B, or that B because A. Aesthetic Value Empiricism implies that A is so because B is so: a work is aesthetically valuable because it is apt to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. I will call the opposite view the *Object Theory*, after Shelley who defends such a view by claiming that aesthetic experiences are only valuable because they are experiences of aesthetically valuable objects.<sup>123</sup>

An important difference between Aesthetic Value Empiricism and the Object Theory is that only the former needs to be accompanied by some theory of the value of aesthetic experiences. This is because on the Object Theory aesthetic experiences may be accounted for as ordinary experiences of extraordinary objects: objects with aesthetic values. Aesthetic Value Empiricism, however, says that objects only have aesthetic values because the aesthetic experiences they are apt to produce are themselves valuable. This raises the question: what exactly is valuable about such aesthetic experiences? I will now consider some possible answers.

#### 4.1.2 Instrumental Aesthetic Values

One thing that seems valuable about some aesthetic experiences is the apparent richness of the sensations involved, for example the experience of a good piece of music seems often to

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<sup>123</sup> SHELLEY 2010, p. 715.

involve complexity, whether of rhythm or instrumentation or some other aspect. Even a solo voice singing a simple melody may be rich in expressiveness or tone. Some experiences of art seem not to involve direct perception, such as reading a novel where one uses sight not to view the work of art itself but rather to interpret symbols which conjure up the work in one's understanding and imagination. But even these somewhat non-sensory experiences can have a sensory component, for instance the words may be sounded out in one's mind at times, especially when the writing has certain poetic qualities.

Richness of sensation may be at least one of the things that can make an aesthetic experience valuable. But in order to characterise the aesthetic values of art works in terms of the independently characterised values of aesthetic experiences, perception cannot be the focus, since it is the perception of features of artworks, which would suggest that making sense of the values of aesthetic experience may depend on making sense of the features of objects that make them aesthetically valuable. That would seem to lead to the Object Theory. Instead, I will defend an account of the values of aesthetic experience from which we can derive an account of aesthetic properties as those things which are apt to produce valuable aesthetic experiences.

As capacities of works, the aesthetic values of art are a type of instrumental value: a work is aesthetically valuable insofar as it is instrumental to the production of valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. Levinson describes Aesthetic Value Empiricism as the view that the experiences an art work can engender are primary in the constitution of the aesthetic values of art.<sup>124</sup> For example, the values of listening to a great song primarily constitute the aesthetic values of that song, as opposed to the values of the song as an

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<sup>124</sup> LEVINSON, Jerrold (forthcoming). *Artistic Achievement, Appreciative Experience, and Artistic Value*, 2012; p. 1.

object being primary and the values of the listening experience being derived from those of the song. Aesthetic value empiricists, then, are committed to *Instrumentalism* about the aesthetic values of art, because the claim that experience values are primary in the constitution of object values is the claim that the object is valuable insofar as it is instrumental to valuable experiences.

If the aesthetic values of art works are a type of instrumental value, we can conceive of art as the practice of trying to create objects which are aesthetically valuable, in the sense that the artist attempts to make something which is instrumental to valuable aesthetic experiences. A successful work of art will be a work that has such instrumental capacities, or rather the degrees to which a work is aesthetically valuable in various ways will be a matter of the degrees to which it has such capacities. I will now consider some instrumentalist theories of aesthetic value that may help to clarify the view I wish to defend.

#### 4.1.3 Aesthetic Values and Aesthetic Experiences

There are a number of contemporary theories of aesthetic values which analyse them in terms of aesthetic experiences. Miller claims that a work has aesthetic value if and only if it is capable of prompting somebody to enjoy a learning-like experience.<sup>125</sup> Walton claims that an object has aesthetic value when it warrants a certain kind of response: pleasure taken in having an attitude such as admiration towards an aspect of the object.<sup>126</sup> Budd claims that a work of art is as aesthetically valuable as the experiences it offers to those who understand it.<sup>127</sup> An experiential analysis of aesthetic values seems to be orthodox in contemporary aesthetics, and this can perhaps be traced back to Kant's claim that objects

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<sup>125</sup> MILLER 2001.

<sup>126</sup> WALTON 1993.

<sup>127</sup> BUDD, Malcolm. *Values of art*. Allen Lane, 1995.

are aesthetically valuable insofar as they produce pleasurable experiences involving the harmonious interplay of the understanding and the imagination.<sup>128</sup>

Miller, for example, draws inspiration from what he calls a “grain of truth” in Kant’s account of aesthetic judgment: that an aesthetic value judgment is an enjoyable response based on experiences like those of learning, even though its goal is one with which we would not ordinarily associate learning (or as Kant puts it, judgments of taste have purposiveness without purpose).<sup>129</sup> I will explain these ideas further in answering the following question: If works of art are aesthetically valuable because they can produce experiences which are valuable, what is it about those experiences that is so valuable?

As Levinson explains, rewarding experiences are an essential product of artistic achievements, unlike other sorts of achievements.<sup>130</sup> The achievement of an athlete in breaking a world record does not seem to depend on her actions being experienced in one way or another. The achievement of a scientist in discovering a new type of carbon might depend in some way on his experience of discovery but the achievement takes place regardless of the values of this experience. The achievements of art, however, seem necessarily to involve works of art having the capacity to produce experiences that we value, and this may be what makes an achievement artistic.

A further consideration favouring the approach of Aesthetic Value Empiricism is a comparison between aesthetic experience and moral experience. Moral experience, for example the experience of disapproving morally of the act of setting fire to cats just for fun, is perhaps an indication of independently-constituted moral values such as harmfulness or

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<sup>128</sup> KANT 1951, p. 52 (§9).

<sup>129</sup> MILLER 2001, p. 38.

<sup>130</sup> LEVINSON 2012, p. 8.

cruelty.<sup>131</sup> A good moral agent or evaluator perhaps should care about such things and can be expected to have experiences indicative of them, which are useful for making true moral claims but which have no intrinsic worth: the point of morality is ultimately to do the right things and refrain from doing the wrong things, and moral experience may at most be a means to these ends.

Of course, doing the right thing could involve undergoing experiences indicative of the moral valence of acts such as burning cats: the act of experiencing something in one way or another could conceivably be voluntary and, like any voluntary act, have a moral valence. But what matters in moral practice is how we behave, and this may or may not include acts of experiencing something in a certain way. The appreciation of art, on the other hand, just is the practice of experiencing art in certain ways. There may, therefore, be nothing beyond their capacity to produce certain experiences to be valued about works of art as works of art. I will now attempt to defend this idea, starting with an initial appeal to intuition that I will then follow with a detailed response to an important objection.

#### 4.1.4 Empiricism and the Object Theory

The question of what is good about good art becomes, for the aesthetic value empiricist, the question of what makes an aesthetic experience rewarding. An object theorist can say that aesthetic experiences are rewarding or valuable when, and because, they are experiences of valuable objects. Experiencing an elegant vase might be rewarding just because the vase has the property of being elegant independently of any disposition to respond to this property.

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<sup>131</sup> This example comes from HARMAN, Gilbert. Ethics and observation. In SHAFER-LANDAU, Russ (ed.) *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*. John Wiley & Sons, 2012: pp. 31-43.

Recall that, as I explained in §2.2.1, there are thick and thin aesthetic value predicates, and 'elegant' is an example of a thick predicate: it combines a descriptive and an evaluative element. The non-evaluative aspect of the term 'elegant' when applied to a vase might refer to the vase's shape rather than the vase's capacity to produce certain responses. But the object theorist will also want to say that the evaluative aspect of the term refers simply to the elegance of the vase, where that is a value possessed by the object, not a capacity to produce a valuable experience. They might concede that an elegant vase in virtue of being elegant has the capacity to produce valuable aesthetic experiences, but they would maintain that the value of those experiences would derive from the apprehension of the response-independent elegance of the vase.

But it seems to me that what is good about an elegant vase must come from its aptness to be appreciated as elegant. Consider the vase and its properties in isolation from the capacity of those properties to produce valuable aesthetic experiences. What value could such properties have, such that the vase not only falls under the descriptive component of the predicate 'elegant', but also its evaluative component? The shape of an elegant vase is perhaps partly what makes it elegant, if the descriptive component of 'elegant' describes its shape, but it seems that the evaluative aspect of the thick concept 'elegant' is such that the concept only applies to an object if it is disposed to produce experiences of elegance.

According to Aesthetic Value Empiricism, elegance is a value because it is a quality of things that we value the experience of, and this seems to offer an explanation of what is valuable about elegance that is lacking in the Object Theory. Nevertheless, I will now respond to an argument favouring the Object Theory.

## 4.2 The Heresy of the Separable Value

Aesthetic Value Empiricism is vulnerable to an objection endorsed by Shelley called *the heresy of the separable value*.<sup>132</sup> The objection is that Aesthetic Value Empiricism implies that something other than a work of art, such as a drug, could have the same aesthetic values as the work, so long as it has the capacity to produce either the same aesthetic experiences or aesthetic experiences with the same values. It seems wrong to say that a drug could have the same aesthetic values as a work of art, and so Shelley argues that Aesthetic Value Empiricism ought to be replaced with the Object Theory.<sup>133</sup>

For a drug to produce indistinguishable experiences from those of a work of art, the drug would need to produce hallucinations as of the work of art, for example a visual hallucination of the *Mona Lisa*. For a drug to produce experiences which are distinguishable and yet have exactly the same values as aesthetic experiences of the *Mona Lisa*, it may also need to be the case that the drug induces a hallucination of the painting. One response to Shelley's objection would be to bite the bullet and say that a drug that could produce such a hallucination would indeed be as aesthetically valuable as the *Mona Lisa*; this is not so costly, given how farfetched it is that such a drug could exist. It is unlikely that in making this response I would commit myself to any actual drugs being the bearers of aesthetic values comparable to those of masterpieces of art.

Perhaps it is merely contingent that such aesthetic masterpiece pharmaceuticals do not exist, but I acknowledge that the aesthetic superiority of great art works compared to drugs is contingent. It may be merely contingent that enslaving racial minorities fails to maximise

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<sup>132</sup> SHELLEY 2010, p. 708.

<sup>133</sup> SHELLEY 2010, pp.719-20.

utility, and one might reject Utilitarianism because it cannot say that slavery is *necessarily* immoral. But many Utilitarians are not unsettled by the mere possibility of unlikely circumstances in which slavery maximises good consequences, and nor do I think they need to be.<sup>134</sup> But a stronger defence of Aesthetic Value Empiricism is available and may be preferable to biting the bullet.

The implication that a non-existent drug would have aesthetic values might not be a great cost to the value empiricist, but it would be a cost to go against the orthodox view that forgeries of paintings, no matter how similar they might be to the originals, are usually of less aesthetic value than their corresponding originals. If Aesthetic Value Empiricism implies the heresy of the separable value, it may do so in the case of perfect forgeries: a forgery will be as valuable as a masterpiece so long as it has the capacity to produce indistinguishable aesthetic experiences from that of the masterpiece.

How, then, should the aesthetic value empiricist respond? The solution may be an externalist theory of aesthetic experiences. Shelley takes the aesthetic value empiricist to be committed to the view that aesthetic experiences are valuable because of their phenomenal quality.<sup>135</sup> But Aesthetic Value Empiricism does not imply this. Aesthetic Value Empiricism is consistent with the values of aesthetic experiences being partly relational: that is, partly due to what the aesthetic experiences are of. Shelley seems to regard this as a retreat to his preferred Object Theory, but it is not clear that this is so, as I shall now explain.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> See HARE, Richard M. What is wrong with slavery? *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1979: 103-121.

<sup>135</sup> SHELLEY 2010, pp. 709-10.

<sup>136</sup> SHELLEY 2010, p. 710.

### 4.2.1 Externalism about Aesthetic Experiences

The role of the understanding in aesthetic experience suggests an understanding of the object of the aesthetic experience: the work of art. If we take an externalist approach to aesthetic experience, the work of art which is the object of an aesthetic experience can form part of the content of the experience: the aesthetic experience of a work of art will be the experience it is partly because it is an experience of that work of art.

The Externalism I employ here is *Externalism about Mental Content*: the view that intentional states are partially constituted by their objects. This view is developed by Colin McGinn from Hilary Putnam's Semantic Externalism, as I shall now briefly explain.<sup>137</sup> Putnam presents a thought experiment in which there is a place called 'Twin-Earth' where people like us talk about 'water', but where that term refers to the substance XYZ instead of H<sub>2</sub>O. XYZ and H<sub>2</sub>O are perceptually indistinguishable in every way, but are distinct natural kinds. An Earthling and a Twin-Earthling may, under exactly the same internal circumstances, point to a lake and say "that is water". But, according to Semantic Externalism, the imperceptible difference in external circumstances will determine that the Earthling means 'that is H<sub>2</sub>O' and the Twin-Earthling means 'that is XYZ'.

McGinn suggests that we should not assume that, because the experiences of H<sub>2</sub>O and of XYZ are *indistinguishable* to the speakers, they must also be *indistinct*.<sup>138</sup> Which substance fills a lake can determine whether one's mental states representative of the lake have one content or another: on Earth one's beliefs about lakes may be about H<sub>2</sub>O even though one does not know that water is H<sub>2</sub>O, and on Twin-Earth those beliefs may be about XYZ even

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<sup>137</sup> PUTNAM, Hilary. Meaning and reference. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 70:19, 1973: 699-711.

MCGINN, Colin. Charity, Interpretation, and Belief. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 74:9. 1977: 521-35.

<sup>138</sup> MCGINN 1977, p. 531.

though, as far as the subject can tell, Twin-Earth lakes are no different to Earth lakes. Thus McGinn arrives at *Externalism about Mental Content*: the view that the content of one's intentional mental states is partly determined by the environment. I do not have space to thoroughly defend this view, but I endorse it and it can inform the present discussion of aesthetic experiences.

On an Externalist view of aesthetic experiences (which involve intentional mental states), an aesthetic experience which for example involves a thought, the object of which is the *Mona Lisa*, could not occur without the *Mona Lisa* existing, as the painting itself is a constituent of the thought. As in Externalism about Mental Content, the extension of our terms is determined partly by the real world, so that the content of an aesthetic experience may be partly constituted by the object of the aesthetic experience: the painting itself. This will at least be the case for ideal aesthetic experiencers who experience works with the degree of epistemic objectivity required for the appreciation of masterpieces (see §3.3.1). An indistinguishable aesthetic experience of something other than the work will, because it is not of the work, be a different aesthetic experience.

Suppose for example that you are staring at the *Mona Lisa* in circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of that work and experiencing (at least some of) its aesthetic values by undergoing the aesthetic experiences it offers. Suppose that you blink, and before you re-open your eyes the painting is speedily replaced by an indistinguishable forgery. You will notice no change and continue to experience what you are seeing as before, except that, unbeknownst to you, you will now be undergoing a different aesthetic experience, because the identity conditions of an aesthetic experience are partly external, and the relevant external circumstances have changed radically, as the work you think you are seeing is

nowhere to be seen. This may help Aesthetic Value Empiricism avoid the heresy of implying that a perfect forgery will be as aesthetically valuable as an original; I will now explore this further.

#### 4.2.2 Externalism and Forgeries

Externalism might not completely solve the above version of the heresy of the separable value challenge to Aesthetic Value Empiricism, as one's experiences of the forgery, although they are distinct from those of the original, might be equally valuable to the experiences of the original. But there are good arguments to the effect that, even if a forgery is indistinguishable from the original, it is aesthetically relevant that it is a forgery rather than the original work, and this fact should inform a proper aesthetic evaluation of the work. If this is true, a work's array of aesthetic values will not be identical to that of an indistinguishable forgery of the work. Nelson Goodman argues that the knowledge that one painting is a forgery of another should be taken into account in one's attempt to discern the values of the two paintings, as this knowledge indicates that one might come to perceive aesthetically relevant differences between the two paintings.<sup>139</sup>

Even if the forgery is so good that it is near-impossible to tell the two paintings apart, it is not the case that the forgery is just as aesthetically valuable as the original, as the fact that one of the paintings is (visibly or not) different in certain respects from the other is still aesthetically relevant: even if this fact does not show up in one's perceptual experience of the paintings, it is relevant more generally to aesthetic practice, which includes the

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<sup>139</sup> GOODMAN, Nelson. *Languages of art: An approach to a theory of symbols*. Hackett publishing, 1968; pp. 99-112.

categorisation of works as part of one or another artist's canon, or part of one tradition or culture or another, and so on.

Another example of an aesthetically relevant feature of a work, about which one is ignorant if one is fooled by a forgery, is the achievement a work represents. A forgery can be difficult to produce, but this has never been sufficient for a work to be a substantial source of aesthetic pleasure. What a forgery cannot be is an original achievement, in the sense of being produced according to the artist's own artistic vision. Knowledge that something is a forgery can cause us to find it to be less aesthetically valuable due to its lack of originality, and so an aesthetic experience of a forgery which is equal in value to an aesthetic experience of the original will presumably be an experience based on the misapprehension that one is viewing an original work. Such a misapprehension is precluded by ideal circumstances, in which one would be aware of aesthetically relevant properties of a work such as who has authored it and when, and therefore aware of whether it is a forgery. In ideal circumstances, knowing that one is seeing a forgery, one's experience will no longer be indistinguishable from that of the original, and may therefore differ in value. So much for forgeries, but I will now return to the original thought experiment of a drug which, according to Aesthetic Value Empiricism, might be capable of having the same aesthetic values as a work of art.

#### 4.2.3 Inseparable Appreciation

As well as ruling out forgeries, ideal circumstances may also preclude being caused to hallucinate by mind-altering substances. But suppose for the sake of argument that they would not: that there could be a drug which causes an ideal aesthetic experiencer to have hallucinatory experiences indistinguishable from their aesthetic experiences of a particular

work of art. Externalism will not allow such experiences to be the very same experiences occasioned by the work, but perhaps they could realise the same values. As I argue in the following sections, this would require that the experiences caused by the drug have the same imaginative content as the experiences caused by the work. I argue that this can involve a sense of exploration of the work and of its effects on one's sensibility including one's imaginative capacities. A hallucinogenic might only have the capacity to produce experiences which are more passive than this, lacking in the distinctive imaginative quality of aesthetic experiences.

More generally, the passivity of an experience might prevent it from qualifying as an experience of aesthetic appreciation. Levinson suggests that appreciation involves being actively engaged in experiencing what one appreciates.<sup>140</sup> He defines 'appreciation' as the experience of something as having positive value, and explains how this is distinct from other relationships one might have to a work of art. Firstly, to appreciate a work is not merely to perceive it, as one can perceive something without responding positively. Second, appreciation is distinct from merely regarding something positively, as one could do this without presently being acquainted with the work. Thirdly, appreciation is distinct from evaluation, as the latter is a type of judgment whereas the former is a response which is not merely (if at all) cognitive in the way that a judgment-response must be. In Levinson's words:

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<sup>140</sup> LEVINSON, Jerrold. The aesthetic appreciation of music. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 49:4, 2009: 415-425; p. 417.

*...evaluation misses out the essentially sympathetic tenor of appreciation, which seeks to avail itself of whatever value some music has to offer, rather than to arrive at a precise assessment of that value.<sup>141</sup>*

Levinson focuses on music here since that is the subject of his paper, but his definition of ‘appreciation’ is of course relevant to the appreciation of other art forms. Finally, Levinson distinguishes appreciation from merely taking pleasure in the experience of a work. Suppose that some music starts playing inside an elevator as one attempts to reach the top floor of a building, and without paying much attention, perhaps without even forming the belief that music is playing, one starts to enjoy the music; perhaps it is relaxing. Levinson would claim, rightly it seems, that this is distinct from (but possibly just as worthwhile as) the *appreciation* of music (or other art), which is a more attentive and less passive engagement with a work. I will now apply this idea to the case of a drug which causes one to hallucinate a valuable work of art.

#### 4.2.4 Heretical Hallucination

If appreciation involves actively rather than passively experiencing and enjoying something, and if appreciation involves experiencing something as positively valuable, this may support my response to the charge of the heresy of the separable value. The problem that value empiricism faces is that it seems it would imply that, were a drug to create an experience indistinguishable from the experience of a work of art, then the drug would have the same aesthetic values as that work of art. But it seems that this indistinguishable experience would need to be a hallucination as of the work, but perhaps hallucinatory experiences cannot qualify as appreciative experiences because they are too passive. So it might simply

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<sup>141</sup> LEVINSON 2009, p.415.

be false that a drug could produce an experience of aesthetic appreciation indistinguishable from that of the aesthetic appreciation of a work of art.

But suppose the drug does induce a more active experience: what then? Hallucinations need not be passive if we consider dreams to be a type of hallucination: lucid dreams often involve not just lucidity but the apparent ability to change the course of a dream by performing actions within the dream, for example I once had a lucid dream in which I decided to explore the contents of a kitchen by opening all of the cupboard doors. Suppose a drug could create an opportunity to imaginatively explore a hallucination of the *Mona Lisa* just as well as one could imaginatively explore the *Mona Lisa*. Perhaps in such a scenario biting the bullet is the only option for the aesthetic value empiricist.

But the scenario specifically involves a perfect hallucination of a work with which an ideal aesthetic experiencer is able to actively engage his imagination and understanding exactly as he would in response to the real work of art. Of course, Aesthetic Value Empiricism may be false, but if it is true, then perhaps in such a scenario (almost certainly a scenario that will never occur) the drug that produces the hallucination is exactly as aesthetically valuable as the painting. It is, after all, merely contingent that the *Mona Lisa* does not have exactly the same aesthetic values as other objects.

It seems, then, that Value Empiricism can survive the objection from the heresy of the separable value. That is, the values of aesthetic experiences can be primary in the constitution of the values of works of art, without this implying that something other than a work of art, such as a forgery or a drug, could have the same aesthetic values as the work, except perhaps in extremely farfetched circumstances. But one might argue that the Object Theory nevertheless wins out because it can rule out separable values with greater ease.

But the apparent role of the imagination in aesthetic experience can, I think, be accounted for more easily by Aesthetic Value Empiricism. I will now begin to say more about how the imaginative content of an aesthetic experience can be the source of a work's aesthetic value.

### 4.3 Aesthetic Experience

As I will explain, the appropriate aesthetic experiences of a work can involve the imagination of features that the work itself does not possess, for example a sad piece of music cannot literally be sad, but an appropriate experience of it may involve imagining that it is. A good piece of sad music may be successful partly insofar as the aesthetic experiences an ideal aesthetic experiencer would have of the music would involve sad feelings or the imagination of sadness, and this suggests that the value of the work is derivative of the qualities of ideal aesthetic experiences of the work.

The imagination allows our experiences of works of art to have contents which depart in certain ways from the works themselves and are plausibly the source of the values of aesthetic experience. A work of art may be aesthetically valuable because it is instrumental to the production of aesthetic experiences which have a valuable content. The content of my experience of the song I am currently listening to seems to include emotions and imaginings among other things, and it is plausible that these things have value in virtue of which the song is perhaps a good work of art. One might argue that it is the song that is valuably emotional and imaginative, and that this is the right way to account for the song as being aesthetically valuable independently of how it is experienced. But I will now attempt to demonstrate that it is better to identify the content of the experiences a good work produces as the source of their value.

In §2.5 I suggested that a Kant-inspired theory of aesthetic experience according to which it involves enjoying the harmonious interplay of the imagination and the understanding may capture what is distinctively valuable about some aesthetic experiences. I will now begin to apply this view to various artistic examples, in order to demonstrate that aesthetic experiences can be primary in the constitution of the aesthetic values of art, without the objection from the heresy of the separable value rendering Aesthetic Value Empiricism implausible.

I will first try to clarify my Kant-inspired psychology of aesthetic experience. This will allow me to claim that properties of art objects that realise dispositions to produce experiences which are distinctively aesthetic are aesthetic properties. Furthermore, insofar as the distinctive qualities of such experiences produce pleasure or displeasure, those aesthetic properties realise aesthetic values (positive or negative) because they are capacities to produce experiences which are both aesthetic and valuable (or disvaluable).

I will briefly articulate Kant's original view about the harmonious interplay of the faculties of imagination and understanding as what characterises aesthetic pleasure. But I will retreat from this view to suggest that aesthetic experiences may be distinguished by their involvement of asserted and unasserted mental states in a playful manner. This is inspired by Kant's view and has something superficially in common with it, namely the interaction of something called 'imagination' with something called 'understanding', but I do not commit myself to Kant's analysis of those terms. There may be better ways to characterise what is distinctive about aesthetic experiences, but my goal here is just to demonstrate that an account of such distinctiveness is available and that it is not necessary to give an account of

the distinctiveness of aesthetic properties independently of how we experience them, in order to defend a moderate Aesthetic Objectivism.

#### 4.3.1 Harmonious Free Play

The interplay between the imagination and the understanding is what Kant identified as the character of aesthetic experience, and this involves the production and mediation of one's imaginative experiences by a proper understanding of the work. I endorse a somewhat similar view of aesthetic experience, according to which it involves both asserted and unasserted mental representations, which conspire to generate a complex cognitive, perceptual and emotional experience which has the potential to be substantially pleasurable.

For example, one who understands the tricky dialogue of *The Wire* and follows the detailed threads of the story will, ideally, be able to imagine what it is like to be part of an underclass in the city of Baltimore. Watching a fictional television series will not be a good way of learning about the goings on of a real city, but it will nevertheless conjure up an imaginative experience of a fictional Baltimore, and this work in particular is praised for its ability to cause the viewer to imagine such things with an unusual level of detail and an integration between different aspects of society depicted in the series, for example, street gangs, politics, law enforcement and the working classes. The fuel this particular work provides for imaginative experiences, and the constraints it places on those experiences in its attempts to be 'realistic' while remaining a work of fiction, seem to make it a valuable work of art.

Kant describes the interaction between the faculties of imagination and understanding in aesthetic experience as a sort of 'play'. I wish to propose something similar in characterising aesthetic experience as involving asserted and unasserted thoughts. Suspension of disbelief

in appreciating a fiction, for example, is a sort of make-believe and is often enjoyable for the same reason that children enjoy playing make-believe.<sup>142</sup> Other imaginative experiences of other sorts of work are similarly playful: one can escape from the world or recreationally alter one's experience of it by undergoing aesthetic experiences. As Walton has shown, games of make-believe are an apt comparison with appreciation of representational art in general.<sup>143</sup>

On Miller's Kant-inspired view (which I introduced in §2.5.3), with certain works of art one can have an enjoyable, perhaps somewhat therapeutic experience, by allowing oneself to *play* in a way that the serious pursuit of learning or a moral life cannot necessarily allow. Miller suggests that genuine learning is an arduous thing and that recreating a similar experience in which there is no pressure to get things right can bring someone who pursues such an arduous task into an enjoyable state of release.<sup>144</sup> I will now explore this idea of aesthetic experience as a playful process a little further, before considering other ways in which it might be valuable.

### 4.3.2 Imagination and Representational Art

The role of the imagination in aesthetic experience makes the values of certain experiences a better explanation of what is valuable in art than works of art by themselves. Imagining might even be a necessary condition for valuable aesthetic experience. If works of art are aesthetically valuable because they give us access to valuable imaginative experiences, one instance of this might be a work which gives us access to a fictional world.

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<sup>142</sup> KANT 1951, p. 52 (§9).

<sup>143</sup> See, for example, WALTON, Kendall L. *Mimesis as make-believe: On the foundations of the representational arts*. Harvard University Press, 1990.

<sup>144</sup> MILLER 2001, p. 51.

James Harold argues that some works of art have values which are present only in the fictional worlds that the works give us access to, so that the work might have low aesthetic value even though it gives us access to highly valuable aesthetic experiences.<sup>145</sup> This may, as I will explain shortly, be an illustration of Miller's theory that pursuing an intellectually and morally serious life can cause us to acquire a need for the experiences offered by certain works of art. He claims that human intelligence seeks the enjoyment of learning, which can be abstracted from learning itself: one can undergo an enjoyable learning-like experience in which one need learn nothing, and Miller suggests that art can offer such experiences.<sup>146</sup> As I have said, this idea is developed from Kant who, as I described in §2.5, also regards aesthetic experience as involving 'purposiveness without purpose'.

An example of what Kant and Miller have in mind might be an aesthetic experience that involves a sort of quasi-exploration: for instance, reading *The Lord of the Rings*, looking at Tolkien's maps of Middle Earth and exercising one's imagination can produce an experience as of exploring Tolkien's fictional world of Middle Earth, in which *The Lord of the Rings* is set. Of course, there is no such world to explore, and there may even be no such fictional world. Currie has argued that so-called 'fictional worlds' are sometimes impossible and where possible they correspond to no possible world in particular, so there is no clear sense in which there are fictional worlds.<sup>147</sup> But it is difficult to deny that it can *seem* as if one is imaginatively exploring another world whilst experiencing something like *The Lord of the*

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<sup>145</sup> HAROLD, James. The value of fictional worlds (or why 'The Lord of the Rings' is worth reading). *Contemporary Aesthetics* [online], 8, 2010 [viewed 16 September 2014]. Available from: <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=584%3E>.

<sup>146</sup> MILLER 2001, pp. 39-41.

<sup>147</sup> CURRIE, Gregory. *The nature of fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 1990; pp. 54-5.

*Rings*, and that this can be enjoyable, and Miller might say it is enjoyable and rewarding precisely because it resembles exploration without involving any genuine exploration.

In the case of *The Lord of the Rings* and similar works, Harold suggests that the work may be to some extent valuable as a means by which to engage imaginatively with a fictional world which is itself aesthetically valuable, in ways that the work antecedently is not.<sup>148</sup> Such cases may involve aesthetic experiences with an imaginative content that departs from the features of the work, for example one imagines, as Tolkien may have intended, the world of Middle Earth in greater detail than Tolkien's texts actually specify. This is well accounted for on the instrumentalist or value empiricist account that I defend.

The Fantasy genre is a good example of this because works in this genre tend to imply vast worlds that cannot be fully captured in the works but which the audience is expected to imagine. But a work need not even have a narrative or a descriptive or pictorial content, let alone be a work of Fantasy, in order to justify these sorts of imaginative experiences which go beyond what is present in the work and yet remain appropriate to the work

### 4.3.3 Imagination and Pure Music

Imaginative experiences of fiction, pictures and other representational works of art can be more easily explained and justified than in cases of abstract art: to experience a novel one must imagine the scenes that it describes; to appreciate a painting of a landscape one must see a landscape in the painting, even though one is really only looking at paint. In these cases, the imaginative content of the aesthetic experiences offered by the work can help to explain how the sources of the work's aesthetic values are the values of the experiences it offers, and not the other way around.

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<sup>148</sup> HAROLD 2010.

But the imagination also seems to play an important role in non-narrative or perhaps even non-representational art. Furthermore, the role of the imagination in the appreciation of the aesthetic values of art may explain how the content of the aesthetic experience of a work can involve qualities such as sadness even when the abstract, non-representational object of the experience is not genuinely sad

In the case of apparently expressive abstract art such as pure music, it seems plausible that the imagination of emotion or expression is justified in response to the work. Certain features of a piece of music, although they might not represent anything, can nevertheless resemble expressions of emotion, and in virtue of this have an emotional impact on the listener which contributes to the value of his aesthetic experience. Other kinds of abstract art might do something similar.

Pure music is thoroughly abstract and features no lyrics, no title, and seems to be comprised entirely of non-representational sounds. Scruton considers such works when he states that imaginative aesthetic experience must remain grounded in and appropriate to the object. His view is that aesthetic appreciation is the appropriate enjoyment of an object for its own sake, with neither free-floating fantasies nor purely intellectual cognitions qualifying.<sup>149</sup>

Scruton says, for example, that in judging that a piece of pure music is sad we imagine that it is sad in the way that people are:

*...the experience of hearing the sadness in the music is in some irreducible way analogous to hearing the expression of sadness—say, in another's voice.*

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<sup>149</sup> SCRUTON 1974, pp. 126-32.

*...the term 'sad' has the same meaning when applied to music and when applied to men...<sup>150</sup>*

I do not entirely agree with this, as it seems that we imagine the sadness in pure music as if we encounter a sad state of affairs. It seems that one's response to sad music should not be one of pity, as it might be for a sad person, but something resembling how one might feel about a sad event having occurred. Nevertheless, it seems that since abstract sounds cannot literally be sad, that to appreciate the 'sadness' of some pieces of pure music we must imagine sadness of some kind. I will now suggest another possible role for the imagination in the aesthetic appreciation of pure music which may suggest how abstract art in general may, along with representational art, engage our imaginations such that our aesthetic experiences may have a valuable content which departs in appropriate ways from the work itself. If this is how we ought to appreciate much that is aesthetically valuable in art, Aesthetic Value Empiricism may account for this better than the Object Theory can.

I will return to the case of sad music in §4.4.5 in relation to the paradox of Tragedy. But it seems there is more to abstract music than just the expression of emotions. Perhaps, when one listens to pure music, another appropriate way to respond is as if one is stepping into an imaginary world whose landscape or imaginary events match the sound of the music, in the same way that the ambient sounds of a room fit the physical make-up of the room or the events taking place in or near the room. We almost always can hear ambient sounds that indicate to us features of our environment. For example, wind whistling through the trees, or the echo of a voice. Perhaps we listen to pure music in a similar way, such that we imagine being in an alien environment that has features that correspond to the abstract

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<sup>150</sup> SCRUTON 1974, p. 127.

sounds we can hear. This thought is inspired by, but as far as I know not held by, Walton who says:

*To the extent that what we "think in" music is unthinkable otherwise, the listener feels in a different realm, a different world—one that is "purely musical" in the sense that it is accessible to him only through music.<sup>151</sup>*

What Walton seems to be describing is analogous to the way that there are things we can 'see in' a pictorial representation.

As Stock argues, it seems that when we appreciate a representational work of visual art we imagine seeing what is represented, when of course all we see is the representation.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, when we appreciate a non-representational work of music it is at least conceivable that the imagination produces a similar experience: one *imagines* being in a purely musical realm just as one might, upon hearing the sounds of traffic, *understand* that one is at the side of a busy road. We might not think about what the features of this 'realm' would be, but nevertheless feel as though, or imagine that, our surroundings are different during the musical experience.

#### 4.3.4 Imagination and Abstract Art

Abstract paintings may produce imaginative experiences similar to those that are produced by pure music, for example the appropriate way to experience a painting by Jackson Pollock might be to imagine that the painting is not a purely abstract distribution of paint but a depiction of something, just not something that one is familiar with or that one can identify.

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<sup>151</sup> WALTON, Kendall L. What is Abstract about the Art of Music? *Journal of Aesthetics and Art*, 1988: 351-364, p. 362.

<sup>152</sup> STOCK 2008.

Or perhaps, rather than treating such paintings as pictures, which is perhaps just to misunderstand them, one ought rather to feel as if one is being confronted with *something* more than paint on a canvas; something which in fact is not present outside one's imagination.

For instance, suppose an abstract painting happens by accident to resemble light passing through the branches of trees: it is perhaps too much to appreciate the painting as if it is a picture of this, but perhaps one ought to feel a similar way to the way one would feel upon appreciating the beauty of light passing through the branches of trees, and other natural phenomena with similar qualities. Perhaps such an experience is not especially imaginative and simply involves enjoying sensations that happen to resemble those that would be produced by aspects of nature, or perhaps there is an element of imagining that one is experiencing something more than paint on a canvas.

To further illustrate what I am gesturing towards, consider the abstract painter Piet Mondrian, whose artistic vision might be summarised as follows: take some of the basic components of our visual experience of the world—horizontal and vertical lines and primary colours—and combine them in abstraction from nature but in a manner that produces a similar response to that produced by beauty in nature. It may be that in appreciating a Mondrian we imagine that we are seeing these colours and shapes in the natural world. Or it may be that the paintings, even though they do not depict anything for us to see in the painting, nevertheless cause us to respond as we might respond to similar colours and shapes in nature, without our having to imagine that the painting is a picture of something. For example, whatever one would feel upon encountering a certain kind of beautiful

landscape, that feeling may be occasioned by some abstract work that resembles the landscape, and that may be how the work manages to function as a beautiful object.

It does seem that one's experience of an abstract painting can have an imaginative content which does not correspond to a simple veridical perception of the paint on canvas, and this content may be the source of the value of the experience without the object itself being the source of this value.

As I mentioned in §4.2, Shelley assumes that Aesthetic Value Empiricism is committed to the view that aesthetic experiences are valuable in virtue of their phenomenal character. I have attempted to show that this assumption is false with examples of what seem to be valuable aesthetic experiences which are valuable in virtue of their content. Works of art are, as Shelley puts it, antecedently valueless, but the mystery of how such things can produce aesthetic experiences, which are valuable not simply because of what it is like to have them, can be solved by clarifying that the content of the aesthetic experience of a work can, due to the role of the imagination, appropriately depart from a mere apprehension of the work's appearance.<sup>153</sup>

Aesthetic experiences are valuable because of the way they are, rather than because of what they are of. The imagination is integral to the pleasures of aesthetic experience: we imagine the unfolding of fictional events or the sensible properties of fictional scenes, we allow two dimensions to appear as if they are three, and even abstract art, which does not depict anything for us to imagine, can give one an experience akin to that of being in some other realm or perceiving something other than what is actually present. However, imaginative aesthetic experiences are inappropriate when they float free of the constraints

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<sup>153</sup> SHELLEY 2010, p. 712.

set by the work, so for example looking for a pictorial content in a purely abstract painting will not generate experiences indicative of the work's objective aesthetic capacities, because such an experience is too much an experience of the content of personal imaginings rather than an experience of the object. Having argued that Aesthetic Value Empiricism gives a plausible explanation of what is good about good works of art, which the Object Theory seems unable to offer, I will now argue against a construal of Aesthetic Value Empiricism according to which the values of aesthetic experiences are aesthetic values.

#### 4.4 The Non-Aesthetic Values of Aesthetic Experiences

As should now be clear, Aesthetic Value Empiricism essentially characterises aesthetic value as a type of instrumental value: the value of being instrumental to the production of valuable aesthetic experiences. A spanner, perhaps, is instrumentally valuable in the sense that it is valuable only insofar as it allows one to do things which are themselves valuable, such as mend a car. Works of art are tools for the production of worthwhile experiences, and some such tools can be used to perform this function with greater success than others. On my account, art is the practice of trying to produce an object infused with capacities to produce valuable aesthetic experiences, the latter being a work's pay-off. But what exactly is this 'pay-off'? What sorts of value do some aesthetic experiences of art have? The answer I wish to give is simple: aesthetic experiences can, in virtue of their aesthetic character, be pleasant or unpleasant to various degrees. I will defend this claim at the end of the present chapter from the objection that it cannot account for the aesthetic values of apparently unpleasant works such as horror, tragedy or sad music.

The pleasure I refer to is ordinary pleasure, taken in somewhat extraordinary experiences which involve asserted and unasserted thoughts about works of art, producing complex

experiences of them. The experiences have a distinctive aesthetic character as I have been explaining, but the pleasure itself is ordinary and does not constitute distinctively aesthetic pleasure and, as I will now explain, is not an aesthetic value of aesthetic experiences, but rather an ordinary hedonic valence.

Aesthetic Value Empiricism says that the aesthetic values of art works depend on *experience values*: values of the aesthetic experiences that works have the capacity to produce. If these experience values are aesthetic values, there could be a problem. If Aesthetic Value Empiricism says that aesthetic values are capacities to produce valuable aesthetic experiences, then for an aesthetic experience E1 to be aesthetically valuable it would need to have a capacity to produce a further valuable aesthetic experience E2. If the aesthetic values of things derive from the *aesthetic* values of the aesthetic experiences those things have the capacity to produce, then it seems that in order for E1 to have the aesthetic values I am supposing it would have, E2's values would also need to be aesthetic values. This seems to lead to an infinite regress: E1 is aesthetically valuable in virtue of having the capacity to produce E2 which must be aesthetically valuable in virtue of having the capacity to produce E3, and so on for every  $E_n$ .

There are two ways the value empiricist might halt this regress. Firstly, Aesthetic Value Empiricism can be interpreted as saying that only the aesthetic values of works of art are instrumental values to produce valuable aesthetic experiences. The aesthetic values of aesthetic experiences need not be analysed in the same way. But if aesthetic experiences, as well as objects such as works of art, can be the bearers of aesthetic values, then it seems they would be subject to aesthetic evaluation. It seems that if works of art can be aesthetically valuable then this can justify the practice of forming aesthetic value judgments

about them. But is there any practice of forming aesthetic judgments about aesthetic experience?

Perhaps we do sometimes form such judgments, but in cases in which we aesthetically evaluate works but *not* the aesthetic experiences we have of them, it seems that we attribute aesthetic values to the work in question but not to the aesthetic experiences it produces. If works of art are aesthetically valuable in virtue of the *aesthetic* values of the (ideal) aesthetic experiences they can produce, then to properly evaluate works we must *aesthetically* evaluate the experiences they produce (in ideal circumstances), and it seems that this is not the proper way to evaluate all works of art.

The second option for the Aesthetic Value Empiricist is to say that the values of aesthetic experiences, in virtue of which what has the capacity to produce them is aesthetically valuable, are *non-aesthetic* values. This halts the infinite regress because Value Empiricism only says that *aesthetic values* are instrumental, not that *the values of aesthetic experiences* are instrumental. However, this option need not rule out possible cases in which aesthetic experiences are *aesthetically* valuable and instrumental to further aesthetic experiences which are in some sense valuable. This point is illustrated by the following analogy.

#### 4.4.1 An Analogy with Higher-Order Thoughts

The *Higher-Order Thought* theory of consciousness says, roughly, that a mental state is conscious if and only if there is a higher-order mental state which represents it.<sup>154</sup> There is no infinite regress of higher-order thoughts on this view because the view does not claim that all mental states are conscious states.<sup>155</sup> The thought is that some of one's mental

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<sup>154</sup> ROSENTHAL, David M. Two concepts of consciousness. *Philosophical studies*, 49:3, 1986: 329-359.

<sup>155</sup> ROSENTHAL 1986, p.336.

states are about others, and the mental states which are represented by others are conscious, and the ones that are not represented by others are unconscious. However, just because no infinite regress follows from this theory of consciousness, this does not mean that there cannot be any conscious higher-order thoughts.

For mental state M1 to be conscious, there must be a mental state M2 which represents M1. M2 may or may not itself be conscious; if it is conscious this will be because there is a mental state M3 which represents M2. M3 also might be conscious, and in theory this regress of conscious higher-order thoughts can go on for as long as the finite capacity of the mind will allow. It is perhaps unlikely that the regress will extend far, but the point is that the Higher-Order Thought theory is neither committed to an infinite regress nor to a bottoming-out (for want of a better term) of higher-order thoughts at any level in particular.

Similarly, the Aesthetic Value Empiricist can say that for a work of art to be aesthetically valuable, it must have the capacity to produce a valuable aesthetic experience E1. If the value of E1 is aesthetic value, then E1 will have the capacity to produce the valuable aesthetic experience E2. The value of E1 could be non-aesthetic, and then there need be no capacity to cause E2, and there is no regress. But just because there is no infinite regress, this does not mean there can be no finite regress. Aesthetically valuable aesthetic experiences may sometimes occur, so long as there is a bottoming-out at some level where there is a non-aesthetically valuable aesthetic experience which requires no further aesthetic experiences to explain its value.

For example, a work might be aesthetically valuable because of its capacity to cause E1 which is aesthetically valuable because of its capacity to cause E2 which is aesthetically valuable because of its capacity to cause E3, and so on until we reach E17 which is non-

aesthetically valuable. This would be a theoretical possibility, but of course I cannot imagine a work of art ever having the capacity to produce, in ideal circumstances, seventeen layers of valuable aesthetic meta-experience. As with the Higher-Order Thought theory, it is likely that the regress of aesthetically valuable aesthetic experiences does not extend far, if at all, but the point is that the Aesthetic Value Empiricist is committed neither to an infinite regress, nor to a bottoming-out of valuable aesthetic experiences at any one level.

Aesthetically valuable aesthetic experiences are not ruled out on my account, but nor is my account committed to them, and certainly not an infinite series of them. If there are aesthetically valuable aesthetic experiences, perhaps an example would be the post-mortem, as it were, that one might go through after having appreciated a work of narrative fiction. Suppose you see a film and find the experience very rewarding. Days later, having found the film so interesting, you might find yourself thinking about key moments in the film, or themes or ideas that it embodied, and you might find yourself relishing the experience of imagining the world in which the fiction is set, or what might occur within that world after the film has ended. Perhaps this experience is itself aesthetic and is an enjoyable aesthetic experience appropriate to its object, where the object is not the film itself, but rather an appropriate aesthetic appreciation of the film which one can recall experiencing. This might render the aesthetic *experience* E1 of the film—in virtue of which the film is aesthetically valuable *qua* capable of producing E1—aesthetically valuable *qua* capable of producing E2, this being the subsequent aesthetic appreciation of E1.

But I remain neutral as to whether the above would ever be an accurate analysis of one's psychological processes following an experience of art. Perhaps no aesthetic experiences are themselves bearers of aesthetic value. That would be no objection to my claim that

works of art are aesthetically valuable in virtue of the non-aesthetic valence of ideal aesthetic experiences of them. To object to my claim here one must argue that there is some problem with the aesthetic values of works deriving from the hedonic value of aesthetic experiences of those works. I will shortly discuss what seems to be the main objection to that hedonistic element of my account.

One could alternatively say that there are two kinds of aesthetic value: the kind that attaches to works of art and other objects; and the kind that attaches to experiences of those objects, in virtue of which the objects have the aesthetic values they have. But the option of introducing non-aesthetic values seems preferable to introducing two kinds of aesthetic value, one for works of art and one for aesthetic experiences. This is because the former does not imply the implausible claim that to properly evaluate a work of art's aesthetic values one must always form aesthetic value judgments about aesthetic experiences. At least in some cases it seems we can simply have a valuable aesthetic experience that a work has the capacity to produce, and evaluate the work on the basis of this, without also evaluating the experience itself.

If I am wrong about this then the other option may suffice: aesthetic experiences may be aesthetically valuable, just not in the instrumental sense in which the works that cause the experiences in ideal circumstances are aesthetically valuable. If I am right and the values of aesthetic experiences are not aesthetic values, it seems that their value can be hedonic since, as I will argue shortly, it seems plausible that positively valuable aesthetic experiences are always pleasurable at some level. This hedonic value may even be a type of moral value, for example according to Utilitarianism which combines a hedonistic theory of value with Consequentialism, or just because as Miller argues we can develop a need for the pleasures

of aesthetic experience, and the value of being instrumental to the satisfaction of a need may be construed as a moral value. But I do not need to be committed to this idea for the purposes of this dissertation.

Suffice it to say that it seems that there is a distinctive source of pleasure in the aesthetic experience of good art, involving something like the harmonious interplay of the imagination and understanding, and works may be aesthetically valuable insofar as they are instrumental to the production of such aesthetic pleasure in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience. Similarly a work may be aesthetically disvaluable insofar as it is apt to produce unpleasant aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. The hedonic valence of aesthetic experiences of works is primary in the constitution of the instrumental aesthetic values of those works.

#### 4.4.2 The Paradox of Horror and Tragedy

I have suggested that the values of aesthetic experiences—in virtue of which what is apt to produce them is aesthetically valuable—are not themselves aesthetic values but instead are values of pleasure or displeasure, taken in distinctively aesthetic experiences. The thought is roughly that, insofar as appropriate aesthetic experiences of a work are pleasant or unpleasant, the work is aesthetically good or bad respectively. But, contrary to this, it often seems that the appropriate appreciative experience of a good work of art is quite unpleasant. Consider this extract from *Wuthering Heights*:

*The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, 'Let me in - let me in!' 'Who are you?' I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. 'Catherine Linton,' it replied,*

*shiveringly (why did I think of Linton? I had read Earnshaw twenty times for Linton) - 'I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!' As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window.*

*Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes...<sup>156</sup>*

This is a revolting scene from which there is no obvious pleasure to be taken. Yet it is a good part of the book, or so I and many other readers would claim, and one can undergo an aesthetic experience from reading it. It seems, then, that aesthetic experience, even 'good' aesthetic experience, might not necessarily be pleasurable.

But this is at odds with our behaviour towards such apparently unpleasant works: we don't just endure works of Horror or Tragedy, we seek them out, spend money on them, and treat them as recreation. Take the film *12 Years a Slave*, which depicts the true horrors of slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in a very vivid and shocking way (all the more shocking given the knowledge that the film is a re-enactment of real events). One hesitates to use words such as 'good' to describe the film, or to say that one enjoyed it, but nevertheless the film was shown at cinemas where people chose to pay money see it, often (as with any film) as a social outing with friends or family. It is implausible that this behaviour can be entirely explained without reference to some kind of enjoyment of the work, as it seems people do not ordinarily engage in behaviour that will merely upset and horrify them, especially not as a way of spending leisure time with friends.

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<sup>156</sup> BRONTE, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1992; pp. 28-9.

Furthermore, it is not as though the film contains new revelations about slavery that are not common knowledge already, or that the anti-slavery arguments advanced in parts of the film and implied in other parts are in any way controversial to the average viewer. Currie has persuasively defended a scepticism about fiction as a reliable source of moral instruction.<sup>157</sup> It might be that we falsely believe in such reliability and seek out works of tragedy or horror for such instruction, but it seems rather implausible that the average cinema-goer would invite his friends out for an evening of moral instruction, rather than an evening of aesthetic experience.

#### 4.4.3 Addressing the Paradox

A simple available explanation as to the popularity and apparent aesthetic value of works of horror and tragedy is that we do actually enjoy the act of appreciating such works. Hume attempts to explain how this is so with a theory according to which imaginative and other responses to something which also elicits unpleasant feelings can, in some cases and not others, convert, as it were, the unpleasantness aspect of one's response into a pleasurable aesthetic experience. So a good work of tragedy might make you feel sad, but those feelings are overshadowed by the overall appreciative experience of the work. On the other hand, a bad work of tragedy might fail to produce an appreciative experience which can outweigh the negative feelings it elicits. But Hume's view is somewhat obscure and has fallen out of favour.

More recently, Berys Gaut suggests, roughly, that there is no paradox of horror (and presumably the same can be said of the paradox of tragedy) because negative emotions are

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<sup>157</sup> See, for example, CURRIE, Gregory. The moral psychology of fiction. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 73:2, 1995: 250-259.

not intrinsically unpleasant: they are typically unpleasant due to the evaluations they tend to involve, but in the context of aesthetic experience one might feel, for example, fear, without forming the kinds of negative evaluations that would make this an unpleasant sensation (as it would be if you took yourself or those you care about to be in genuine danger).<sup>158</sup>

Alternatively, Susan Feagin suggests that the paradox of tragedy (or of horror or other kinds of deliberately somewhat unpleasant art) can be solved by acknowledging that we have unpleasant reactions to certain works of art that we enjoy, but that this is compatible with having a pleasurable reaction to the situation that this puts us in.<sup>159</sup> For example, one might cry at a film about the holocaust due to genuine feelings of sadness, and at the same time be glad that one has such emotional capacities and appreciate the film's capacity to elicit them in creative ways.

The above attempts to solve the paradox of Tragedy or Horror are not in any obvious conflict with one another. I will not attempt to defend any one of them in particular, but it seems we are well-stocked in solutions to this problem: the burden of proof, I think, is on one who wishes to claim that there is some kind of problem with positive aesthetic value necessarily involving pleasure. But I will consider one more solution to the apparent paradoxes in a little more detail, as it follows from a theory of aesthetic appreciation which can explain much more than just the values of Horror and Tragedy.

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<sup>158</sup> GAUT, Berys. The Paradox of Horror. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 33:4, 1993: 332-46.

<sup>159</sup> FEAGIN, Susan. The Pleasures of Tragedy. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 20:1, 1983: 95-104.

Walton seems to offer a similar solution to Feagin in the course of describing his general theory of aesthetic value.<sup>160</sup> In his terms, we are inclined to find a work to be marvellous and take delight in this, even when what we are admiring is its capacity to elicit what in other contexts we would prefer not to experience. Unpleasant responses may be pleasant at a higher level in the sense that we enjoy admiring the work's capacity to produce them. Or as Walton puts it:

*...whether or not one enjoys being revolted or judging a work negatively, one might at the same time admire it for its capacity to produce revulsion or to elicit a negative judgment, and one might enjoy admiring it for this. If we understand the artist's objective to be to disgust the appreciator or to provoke negative judgments, we may admire with pleasure his achievement in accomplishing this end. The kind of aesthetic value that consists in a capacity to elicit pleasurable admiration... can thus coexist with, and indeed depend on, a capacity to disgust or irritate or evoke negative judgments. And we may, accordingly, judge the work positively.<sup>161</sup>*

Walton claims that in aesthetic experience we do not merely enjoy pieces of art. We take delight in judging them to be good; we appreciate them.<sup>162</sup> His theory of aesthetic values is similar to Miller's in the sense that he identifies aesthetic values as an aptness to produce rewarding aesthetic experiences. Walton claims that an object has aesthetic value when it warrants a certain kind of response: pleasure taken in having an attitude such as admiration

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<sup>160</sup> WALTON 1993.

<sup>161</sup> WALTON 1993, p. 508.

<sup>162</sup> WALTON 1993, p.505.

towards an aspect of the object.<sup>163</sup> I do not endorse Walton's theory of aesthetic values in full, but it offers an interesting general notion: that the aesthetic experiences on which aesthetic values may depend could involve admiring an artist's achievement in producing a work of art, rather than simply admiring features of the work such as brushstrokes and key changes. The aesthetic experience of works of art can sometimes involve admiring the artist's achievement. Sometimes, though, the artist is not consciously a part of our experience. Perhaps in such a case our attitude is not always one of admiration, or perhaps we take no attitude at all and simply have a pleasurable response occasioned by the work.

It seems that the question of how a work of art can be good in virtue of its capacity to induce unpleasant feelings can be answered broadly according to a Waltonian view that we take a pleasurable attitude towards some of the capacities of some works of art and this may include their capacities to make us have unpleasant feelings. The paradigm valuable aesthetic experience of a work of art is one of pleasure: one enjoys the way the music sounds, or the way an artefact looks, or the content of the story being told, or whatever one is acquainted with by experiencing a work of art. There are apparent counterexamples to a principle that states that a work is good insofar as it elicits pleasure: for example a good film about the horrors of the Second World War should not, it seems, elicit pleasure throughout one's experience of it, and it seems plausible that some good works should not be enjoyed at all. However, Walton and others demonstrate that we need not enjoy the content or features of a work of art in order to enjoy the achievements that they represent.

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<sup>163</sup> WALTON, 1993, pp. 504-5.

A good war film is an achievement in, for example, moving an audience to tears in a way that reflects not an overly sentimental or fictionalised understanding of historical events but something like a realistic reproduction of how it can feel to be part of that sort of event.

A recent television drama called *Amber* achieves a similar thing, in my opinion: the empathetic viewer cannot help but imagine what it is like to experience what the characters experience, namely, losing a child and not knowing if she is alive or dead or where or why she has gone, and never finding the answer to any of these questions. This is, of course, the imaginative reconstruction of a horrible experience, so it might seem odd that viewers are drawn to such things or that they represent a valuable achievement. But the fact is that, for whatever reason, we are drawn to such works, perhaps because we do take pleasure in admiring an artist's imaginative recreation of a horrible experience, and this need not be explained by some sort of masochism, but simply by our tendency to take pleasure in valuing the achievements of artists. It seems likely that valuable aesthetic experiences necessarily involve pleasure, even in cases of Horror or Tragedy, since pleasure can act as an incentive to seek out experiences of such works, which of course we often do.

#### 4.4.5 Sad Music Revisited

As well as works of Horror and Tragedy, which tend usually to be depictions of one kind or another of something horrific or tragic, there are also abstract works of art which can have intense emotional effects when properly appreciated. As I explained in §4.3.3, Scruton says that the sadness involved in some pieces of pure music is imaginary given the fact that abstract sequences of sound are incapable of genuinely being sad.<sup>164</sup> More specifically, perhaps what sadness in pure music amounts is that an appropriate aesthetic experience of

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<sup>164</sup> SCRUTON 1974, p. 122.

some pure music will involve one or more of the following: imagining that the music feels sad; imagining that the music is a sad event; feeling sad; feeling sympathy; or having some other kind of sadness-related experience.

Appropriate experiences of sad music, then, may feature sadness or something related to sadness, whereas the music itself is abstract and only sad insofar as appropriate experiences of it are as described. It may be that the imaginative quality of aesthetic experiences is what supplies such abstract works with their derivative sadness, but the imaginative experience of the work must be appropriate to it. Furthermore, for the experience of sad music to be valuable, so that works of sad music can themselves be aesthetically valuable, there must be more to the experience than unpleasant emotions: one must take pleasure in appreciating the music, perhaps as an achievement in moving the listener emotionally.

Wagner's Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* is famously expressive of certain emotions which can be extremely unpleasant, such as yearning and despair. It is also, I assume, an excellent piece of music, and this is plausibly because an appropriate experience of it, while it might resemble or reflect the unpleasant emotions expressed, nevertheless involves a certain satisfaction taken in experiencing what seems to be a masterful artistic expression of emotion.

In defending Aesthetic Value Empiricism, and identifying the hedonic valence of aesthetic experiences as primary in the constitution of the aesthetic values of works of art, I have needed to offer an explanation of how we may take pleasure in aesthetically valuable works of Horror and Tragedy and other apparently unpleasant kinds of art. It seems that there is no real paradox in our appreciation of these things, and so this is not a problem for the

claim that works of art are positively valuable in virtue of the positive values of the experiences they offer, including experiences that involve negative feelings.

Furthermore, no concession to the Object Theory is made in my claim that the unpleasant content of an aesthetic experience need not necessarily render the work apt to produce the experience negatively valuable in that respect. This is because it is not the antecedent values of the object which make up for the unpleasantness of the experience; rather, it is the additional pleasantness of the experience that renders the experience positive despite having a negative component. For example, one may feel fear at a Horror film, which may be unpleasant, but one may also feel pleasure in admiring the film's capacity to elicit such fear just by the use of sound and vision presented in a safe environment.

## 4.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have explained the notion of Aesthetic Value Empiricism which forms part of my account of aesthetic values in art. I have argued that aesthetic values in art are instrumental values to produce valuable aesthetic experiences. Valuable aesthetic experiences are enjoyable at some level in a way that involves imagination and understanding. The value of aesthetic experiences in virtue of which art works apt to produce them are aesthetically valuable may not itself be aesthetic value. In the following three chapters of this dissertation I will defend Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism from various objections and rival theories, starting with a discussion of apparently faultless disagreements, which pose a challenge to forms of Aesthetic Objectivism.

## 5. Relativism and Faultless Disagreements

### 5.0 Introduction

In the previous four chapters I have argued that our apparently conflicting intuitions about the objectivity or subjectivity of aesthetic values in art can be reconciled by what I am calling *Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism*. The account combines the following three claims (where V is a positive aesthetic value such as beauty or elegance):

*Humean Response-Dependence*: An art work W has aesthetic value V if and only if an ideal aesthetic experiencer IE would experience W as having V.

*Aesthetic Objectivism*: IE would experience W as having V because W has V.

*Aesthetic Value Empiricism*: W has V because the above experience is itself valuable in virtue of being pleasurable in a complex manner involving imagination and understanding.

Where V is a negative aesthetic value such as ugliness or garishness, instead of being pleasurable the latter experience will have a negative hedonic valence.

The aesthetic values of works of art are capacities to elicit valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. Those aesthetic experiences are subjective in the sense that what they are like can only be known from the inside, but whether a work has the capacity to produce such an experience is objective in the sense that it supervenes on features, such as distributions of paint or sequences of notes, that the work has independently of how it is experienced or how we are disposed to experience it.

In this chapter I argue that apparent cases of faultless aesthetic disagreement can be explained on the above account as faultless variations in aesthetic experience. I also argue that the account can accommodate other considerations that might be seen to favour a more fine-grained sort of Aesthetic Relativism. I consider various shades of Aesthetic Relativism in relation to disagreements and differences of interpretation and suggest that my view can account for these phenomena more successfully than other relativistic theories.

## 5.1 Aesthetic Relativism

*Relativism* is a type of view that involves identifying a reference class and claiming that the nature of something is relative to this class. For example, *Cultural Relativism* in aesthetics states that the aesthetic values of an object are relative to cultures, so that the same object can have an aesthetic value relative to some cultures and lack that same value for different cultures. An example of this might be the London 2012 Olympic opening ceremony which included a comedy sketch that was received differently by the media in different nations. The sketch was themed after the James Bond film franchise and included a man dressed to look like Queen Elizabeth II, skydiving into the Olympic Stadium. Many viewers in Britain and elsewhere found the sketch amusing, but it was reported that in China, for example, some commentators seemed “stunned to near-silence”.<sup>165</sup> They might have not understood that it was intended to be funny, or they may have understood this but not found it funny due to cultural differences between their nation and others in which viewers did find the sketch amusing.

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<sup>165</sup> TOPPING, Alexandra. Olympics opening ceremony: the view from abroad [online]. *The Guardian*, 2012 [viewed 25 August 2014]. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2012/jul/27/olympics-opening-ceremony-view-from-abroad>.

Perhaps being part of a community which does not find such things funny amounts to not being in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of this comedy sketch. Or perhaps a work which is funny to competent critics in one culture and not funny to competent critics in another is funny relative to some cultures and not others. Certainly there are works of art with which this phenomenon occurs: they are generally liked by some cultures and disliked by others. Supposing that this is the case with the Olympic sketch, a cultural relativist can say that the sketch was funny relative to British culture, and not funny relative to, for example, Chinese culture.

I should clarify that I am simplifying for the sake of argument: obviously there is no single Chinese or British culture, and one person can presumably belong to many cultures. But supposing that we have a situation where two separate cultures form different judgments about the comedy value of a sketch, the cultural relativist can say that the comedy value of the sketch really did vary from culture to culture.

On my account, aesthetic values are anthropocentric, and this might be understood as a kind of Aesthetic Relativism, with human beings as a reference class relative to which works of art can be aesthetically valuable in various ways. This would be a coarse-grained form of Aesthetic Relativism, as the reference class is large. Relativism to individual subjects at particular times would be an example of a very fine-grained type of Aesthetic Relativism. There are various other degrees to which a type of Relativism may be coarse- or fine-grained: potential reference classes include subcultures, social classes and levels of maturity.

What all forms of Aesthetic Relativism have in common is the claim that not only do different types of critic prefer different works of art, but works of art really are aesthetically

valuable or disvaluable for some groups or individuals and not others, so that *faultless disagreement* is possible: two critics can form contrary aesthetic value judgments about the same object without any possibility of either critic making an epistemic improvement by revising her judgment. I will now consider the extent to which Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism involves Relativism.

## 5.2 Aesthetic Sensibilities

In §3.2.3 I suggested that, according to my own Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism, disparate aesthetic experiences may occur in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience, due to variations of sensibility. Sensibilities can vary between individuals, species, and other groupings of individuals. The sensibilities of members of the human species have a degree of similarity partly in virtue of which they can be identified as members of the same species. For example human perceptual, emotional, cognitive and other faculties can be regarded as features of a human sensibility type, and my own set of dispositions to respond to the world, insofar as I have them because I am a human being, constitute a particular token of that type. But human sensibilities do, of course, vary between individuals and between groups.

There are sensibility abnormalities of various kinds: for example, most of us perceive colour approximately the same way, so far as we can tell, but of course there is such a thing as colour-blindness; there is also such a thing as *amusia*, which involves an abnormal insensitivity to pitch leading to the inability to appreciate music in the way that most human

beings are able to.<sup>166</sup> Apart from such conditions we also vary in subtler ways and in ways that we do not regard as deficiencies.

Within a type, sensibility tokens can vary in terms of refinement, as in the refinement of the ideal aesthetic experiencer who has a human-type sensibility of great refinement relative to the standard of taste that I described in chapter 3. Crucially, the ideal aesthetic experiencer's sensibility is refined so as to be conducive to the appreciation of masterpieces of art which are identifiable by measures such as the test of time.

Aesthetic values are relative to sensibility types, and not to differently refined tokens of a sensibility type: the aesthetic values of art are anthropocentric and therefore relative to human sensibilities, but they are not relative in a more fine-grained way to human sensibilities of different degrees of refinement. This means that, contrary to the claims of a more individualistic Aesthetic Relativism, or a strong form of Aesthetic Subjectivism, there is such a thing as expertise in aesthetic appreciation, and one's aesthetic responses outside of ideal circumstances are less valid in the sense that they do not function as reliable indications of a work's aesthetic values. My account can thus be construed as a type of Relativism which I will call *Sensibility Relativism*, which makes room for expertise and error in aesthetic evaluation to a greater extent than more fine-grained forms of Relativism, to an extent that may justify our objectivist intuitions about aesthetic values in art. To clarify how Sensibility Relativism differs from more fine-grained forms of Aesthetic Relativism, I will now describe an analogy, which I alluded to in §2.1.1.

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<sup>166</sup> PERETZ, Isabelle, et al. Congenital amusia: a disorder of fine-grained pitch discrimination. *Neuron*, 33:2, 2002: 185-191.

### 5.2.1 Sensibility Relativism

Suppose that the sexual attractiveness of a human being is relative to one's sexual orientation, which perhaps can be construed as a type of sensibility. For the sake of argument, consider a narrow construal of sexual attractiveness as visually appealing to one's sexual desires, and a simple binary model of sexual orientation. A heterosexual man is not in error if his sexual orientation leads him to find another man unattractive, one who (let us suppose) any heterosexual woman or homosexual man would regard as highly attractive. Now consider how one's sexual sensibility might be more or less refined.

One's sexual sensibility might be refined partly insofar as one is able to see with a normal degree of clarity. The ideal aesthetic experiencer too is one with the ability to make fine perceptual discriminations, and a critic who cannot is a critic whose aesthetic sensibility is not as well refined. Good eyesight will make one better at finding a mate to whom one is disposed to be sexually attracted in the narrow visual sense, and so this will be a variable affecting the overall refinement of one's sexual sensibility token. One's deficiencies of eyesight might be as predetermined as one's sexual orientation, but one's sexual dispositions are, perhaps, attuned to what one would perceive under normal circumstances.

Suppose that as a short-sighted person I judge the sexual attractiveness of people, who are some distance away, differently depending on whether I am wearing my glasses. It is clearly false that facts about the sexual attractiveness of people relative to my sexual sensibility vary according to whether or not I am wearing my glasses. Rather, the effect of leaving my glasses off is that I am more likely to misascribe sexual attractiveness (relative to my sexual sensibility): I might, for example, misidentify a man as someone to whom I am disposed to be sexually attracted, because my blurry vision leads me to see them as an attractive

woman; were I to see that person clearly I would not, as a heterosexual male, be attracted to them.

The sexual attractiveness of a person in this narrow visual sense, then, may be relative to one's sexual sensibility, but not to the refinement of one's sexual sensibility. That is, broadly speaking, for homosexual men and heterosexual women, men are attractive and women are not (at least according to the simplified model of sexuality that I am using here to serve the analogy), and in that sense attractiveness is relative to orientation. But the class of people who are attractive relative to my sexual sensibility cannot be altered by changes to the refinement of my sexual sensibility, but it could be altered by a change to the type of sexual sensibility I have, so supposing it were possible to alter my brain so that I became homosexual, there would be a *de dicto* shift in the class of people to whom I am disposed to be visually attracted. Therefore, although attractiveness or indeed aesthetic values might be relative to sensibilities, there can still be room for refinement of sensibility allowing for expertise in the detection of that to which one is disposed to respond with appreciation of some kind. Plenty of judgments will turn out to be mistaken given Sensibility Relativism.

Aesthetic values are relative to aesthetic sensibilities rather than to ideal circumstances, the latter being the circumstances in which whatever aesthetic sensibility one has is fully manifest in the production of aesthetic experiences in response to the aesthetic capacities of works of art. A critic with non-human sensibilities (a Martian, for instance) would be such that the aesthetic values of objects may be different to them, but a critic with an unrefined human sensibility is not part of a different aesthetic community to whom different things are beautiful; such a critic is merely insensitive to anthropocentric aesthetic values in art. In

that respect Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism, while it might be construed as involving Sensibility Relativism, differs from certain other forms of Aesthetic Relativism: in particular, it better accounts for the objectivist intuitions I described in §2.3. I will now return to the issue of the apparent possibility of faultless disagreement and consider whether my account can explain this adequately.

### 5.3 Faultless Disagreements

If faultless disagreements about the aesthetic values of works of art can occur, this might, as Max Kölbel argues, be best explained by the truth value of aesthetic value judgments being relative to a reference class, so that two aesthetic value judgments, which express incompatible propositions, can both be true.<sup>167</sup> This is not quite what I claim: as I explained in §3.2, my account allows for the possibility that different ideal aesthetic experiencers might experience the same work differently and correctly ascribe different values to it. One might regard this as faultless disagreement, in which case my account can accommodate faultless disagreement, but it actually seems to be a faultless difference in aesthetic experience, on the basis of which one can make aesthetic value judgments reflecting different aspects of a work and its array of aesthetic values, without contradiction or genuine disagreement.

Perhaps, then, Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism does not allow for genuine faultless disagreement, and instead allows for faultless, merely apparent disagreement. If faultless disagreements are possible, this might be better explained by Kölbel's genuine Relativism or

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<sup>167</sup> KÖLBEL, Max. III—Faultless disagreement. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (Hardback)*, 104:1, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.

by some other account. Before I consider such options, I will say a bit more about what faultless disagreement is supposed to be

It is sometimes claimed that it is possible to faultlessly disagree over certain matters, usually matters of taste, whether gustatory or aesthetic.<sup>168</sup> A faultless disagreement is a case of genuine disagreement in which, contrary to Wright's cognitive command constraint which I described in §1.4, no participant in the disagreement is at fault in believing or asserting that with which the other disagrees. For example, consider the following discussion of cheese:

Smith: "Cheese is nice."

Jones: "No, cheese is not nice."

There appears to be a disagreement here, because Smith appears to have claimed that P, where P is the proposition that cheese has the property of being nice, whereas Jones appears to have claimed that not-P. Furthermore, Jones precedes his apparent claim that not-P with the word 'no', seeming to imply that Smith is wrong about cheese. Despite the apparent contradiction, it is tempting to say that such claims about matters of taste cannot be made in error so long as they reflect one's preferences. If P were the proposition that 'two plus two equals four', it would be clear that Jones, in claiming 'not-P', would be making a false claim, so there are some discourses in which faultless disagreements appear to be possible, and others in which they appear not to be.

The appearance of faultless disagreement can be found in aesthetic matters of artistic taste also, such as the following:

Smith: "The Rolling Stones are better than the Beatles."

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<sup>168</sup> See, for example, KÖLBEL 2004.

Jones: “No, The Beatles are better than The Rolling Stones.”

Again, it looks as though Smith and Jones are flat-out contradicting one another, and yet if Smith prefers the Stones while Jones prefers the Beatles, it is tempting to say that they both make true claims.

Kölbel provides a useful taxonomy of answers to the following questions: Are faultless disagreements possible? If so, how? If not, are the apparent cases not disagreements or not faultless? I will now briefly defend my answers to these questions, and defend the type of position that Kölbel identifies as resulting from my answers.<sup>169</sup> In doing so I will resist the move from apparent faultless disagreement to a fine-grained Aesthetic Relativism.

I am sympathetic to the view that faultless disagreements are simply not possible: If there is a disagreement then someone involved is mistaken, and therefore if no one is mistaken then there can be no disagreement.<sup>170</sup> But I will now consider the options available in accounting for cases in which faultless disagreements do seem to occur.

### 5.3.1 Indexical Relativism

Apparent cases of faultless disagreement about the aesthetic values of art might not be genuine disagreements, and as Kölbel suggests, this would imply a form of *Indexical Relativism*.<sup>171</sup> As Carl Baker puts it, there could be a “hidden indexical parameter” in aesthetic value judgments such that Smith and Jones each pick out their own evaluative standards when they make utterances such as those in the previous section, and in doing so

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<sup>169</sup> KÖLBEL 2004, p. 57.

<sup>170</sup> This view is defended by STOJANOVIC, Isidora. Talking about taste: disagreement, implicit arguments, and relative truth. *Linguistics and Philosophy*. 30:6, 2007: 691-706.

<sup>171</sup> KÖLBEL 2004, p. 57.

they could express true propositions in the form of sentences which *prima facie* contradict each other.<sup>172</sup>

Indexical Relativism is distinct from the type of Relativism that Kölbel defends, according to which there is no hidden indexicality in aesthetic value judgments, but rather their truth value is relative to frames of reference, so that disagreements can be faultless because it is possible for two contradictory judgments to each be true relative to different perspectives.<sup>173</sup> This view is motivated to explain the possibility of faultless disagreement, but for now I will continue to review the options for denying such a possibility.

Returning to the option of Indexical Relativism, it is plausible that, at least sometimes, one confuses what one likes or dislikes with what is good or bad, or *vice versa*, such that an apparent disagreement about whether something is good may turn out not to be a disagreement. I therefore acknowledge that sometimes what seems *prima facie* to be an aesthetic disagreement might just turn out to be a pair of what Kant would have called judgments of agreeableness, which are judgments about what one likes or dislikes and cannot contradict judgments about what someone else likes or dislikes.

But leaving aside cases in which one confuses what one likes or dislikes with what is good or bad, Indexical Relativism begins to seem implausible. Kölbel rejects it on the grounds that it cannot properly explain a case in which one starts out consciously not liking something and judging it to be bad, then begins consciously to like it and judges it to be good. One ought then to say, it seems, that one was previously correct in believing 'I don't like this', but incorrect in believing 'this is not good'. But the indexical relativist is committed to saying

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<sup>172</sup> BAKER, Carl. Indexical contextualism and the challenges from disagreement. *Philosophical Studies*, 157:1, 2012: 107-123; p. 109.

<sup>173</sup> KÖLBEL 2004, p. 72.

that one was correct in previously judging the thing not to be good, given that at the time one did not like it.<sup>174</sup> The indexical relativist may bite this bullet but it seems implausible that, when one changes one's mind about whether something is good, one should regard oneself as having been right all along.

On my account the situation in the artistic case of the previous section is as follows. Either the music of the Beatles or the music of the Stones, or neither, has the greater overall capacity to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience. Aesthetic value judgments are judgments about such aesthetic capacities, and so at least one of the aesthetic value judgments made by Smith and Jones is false. Asserting or believing something false is a mistake, and so the disagreement is one in which at least one participant is at fault just in the sense that they are mistaken. Leaving aside cases which I acknowledge as non-disagreements that might be mistaken for faultless disagreements, it seems that the remaining apparent cases of faultless disagreement may not really be faultless on my account.

Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism may fall into Kölbel's category of *Mitigated Realism*, which states that the aesthetic values of art are objective and that this implies that faultless disagreements about them are impossible, but which also suggests an explanation as to why it can nevertheless appear that critics faultlessly disagree.<sup>175</sup> [Corrected thesis1.docx - ftn11](#) I will now explain this further with reference to Hume's discussion of what he described as "blameless" disagreements.

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<sup>174</sup> KÖLBEL 2004, pp. 63-4.

<sup>175</sup> KÖLBEL 2004, p. 59.

### 5.3.2 Blameless Disagreements

Hume claims that some aesthetic disagreements are due to blameless variations in preference. He gives the example of age-related preferences and suggests that one is not necessarily mistaken if, due to being one age or another, one's preferences, even in ideal circumstances, differ to those of other ages.<sup>176</sup>

Suppose we have two ideal aesthetic experiencers, one aged 25 and one aged 65. The 25-year-old prefers the film *Withnail & I* to the film *About Schmidt*, and the 65-year-old has the opposite preference. It is plausible that the former film ought to appeal more to a younger audience given that it is about relatively young men without jobs or families. It is also plausible that the latter film ought to appeal more to an older audience since it is about a retired widower with an adult daughter. The preferences of the two critics appear to be blameless, but if the cognitive command constraint were at play (see §1.4), it would seem that if the two critics disagree about which is the better film, at least one of them must be subject to some kind of cognitive shortcoming.

One possibility, as before, is that the two critics do not actually disagree: they prefer to watch different films, but when it comes to making judgments about their merits and defects they are in agreement with each other. I believe that the works of Beethoven are objectively superior to those of the glam rock band The New York Dolls, and yet I spend much more time listening to the latter and for some reason prefer to do so. More importantly, I seem not to be alone in this: whether rational or not, it seems to be commonplace to prefer something without judging it to be better.

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<sup>176</sup> HUME 1985, p. 244.

A second possibility is that two ideal aesthetic experiencers may blamelessly disagree but cannot faultlessly disagree. Suppose that this sentence contains a typing error; this is a shortcoming and a fault of sorts, and yet I am perhaps not to blame: perhaps one of the keys on my laptop has suddenly stopped working due to a manufacturing fault, or perhaps some typing errors are so easy to make and difficult to spot that one who makes such an error is not blameworthy for doing so. Perhaps either the 25-year-old or the 65-year-old critic is mistaken in claiming that one film is better than the other, and yet ought not to be blamed for this mistake.

A third possible explanation, of a case where two critics of different ages are in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience and yet have opposite preferences regarding two works of art, is that age changes a person's sensibility such that the consequences of meeting the conditions for ideal circumstances can vary with age (among other factors). The 25-year-old or the 65-year-old is not culpable if her aesthetic judgments fail to reflect the aptness of works to produce valuable aesthetic experiences for human beings in general. But one's age, like any variation in aesthetic sensibility, may nevertheless count as a kind of shortcoming in the sense that one is limited by one's own point of view and sensibility in assessing a work's aesthetic values. One is always limited by one's point of view, and insofar as aesthetic experiences of the same work can differ when had by different ideal aesthetic experiencers, or by the same ideal aesthetic experiencer on different occasions, one's perspective does constitute a shortcoming.

In that sense, then, perhaps ideal aesthetic disagreements are always faulty. Other aesthetic disagreements may be faulty in a more obvious sense: at least one participant has fallen short of ideal circumstances. Nevertheless it can seem that faultless disagreements

occur, within or without ideal circumstances, for various reasons, three of which I have described: (1) we can confuse judgments of agreeableness with aesthetic value judgments; (2) we can disagree without being culpable for our mistakes; (3) we can faultlessly differ in our aesthetic experiences of a work. I will now consider what my account can say if there are genuine faultless aesthetic disagreements.

### 5.3.3 Ideal Disagreements

As I explained in §3.2.2, critics in the ideal circumstances for aesthetic judgment could not disagree because by definition they would perform perfect inferences on the basis of full information about a work's array of aesthetic capacities relative to the variety of human sensibilities that can affect one's aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience. For instance, an ideal aesthetic judge would be aware of the capacities of *Wuthering Heights* to be experienced, perhaps, as a Gothic tale of doomed lovers and as a Romantic tale of true love in a difficult world.

The situation is reminiscent of *Rubin's Vase*: the optical illusion which can either look like a picture of two faces or a vase, but normally only one of these two things at a given moment of one's perception of it.<sup>177</sup> The picture is of a vase and it is of two faces, but when one sees it as of two faces one does not normally see it as of a vase, and vice versa. Consider now the following apparent disagreement:

Smith: "This is a picture of just a vase."

Jones: "No, it is a picture of just two faces."

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<sup>177</sup> RUBIN, Edgar. *Synsoplevede Figurer (Visually Experienced Figures)*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1915.

This seems to me to be a faulty disagreement: both Smith and Jones have failed to notice that Rubin's Vase is a picture of a vase and two faces.

Supposing that disagreements can be faultless, however, this might be the sort of situation in which they could occur: two critics see two different things in the same object without being subject to any cognitive shortcoming, but on the basis of such faultless impressions they make utterances which constitute a disagreement because they express incompatible propositions. Whether or not such cases involve faultless disagreements, my account does allow for similar situations involving contrasting aesthetic value judgments based on the ideal aesthetic experiences of different critics.

The same work of art may be apt to produce two incompatible kinds of aesthetic experience in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience, with each experience being indicative of capacities possessed by the work, which in virtue of the values of the experiences are aesthetic capacities, or in other words aesthetic values. The experiences may be incompatible just because they rely on varieties in the sensibilities of different human beings, or even because they involve experiencing the same property as either beautiful- or ugly-making. A critic in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience cannot step away from her own sensibility-laden experience of the work without losing access to its values relative to her sensibility. Different ideal aesthetic experiencers may therefore reach different conclusions about the aesthetic values of a work, without it being the case that any of them could have made an improvement to their epistemic position.

In a sense, then, ideal aesthetic experiencers might faultlessly disagree on my account. But it remains the case that a work *W* has aesthetic value *V* if and only if there could be a critic in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of *W* who experiences *W* as having *V*.

Different sensibilities may cause different ideal aesthetic experiencers to experience  $W$  as having  $V$  or not having  $V$ , or as having  $V$  or  $V^*$ , but in fact it has all of the values that it can be experienced in ideal circumstances as having.

I have not said enough to rule out forms of Relativism such as that which Kölbel endorses, but I hope to have shown that the apparent possibility of faultless disagreement does not provide a strong reason to prefer such an account to my own. I discuss fine-grained forms of Aesthetic Relativism in relation to aesthetic testimony in §7.3.2. I will now consider one final, more speculative way in which an apparent faultless disagreement might occur and might be explained by Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism. In doing so I will introduce the topic of cultural differences in aesthetic taste, and following on from this in chapter 6, the challenge from sceptics about the aesthetic values of art.

## 5.4 Cultural Variation

As I tried to illustrate in §5.1, some cases of apparent faultless aesthetic disagreement may occur between members of disparate cultures. Consider first a thought experiment: suppose that a British artist has a love life which is unusual compared to fellow Brits, but which resembles the love lives of most members of some undiscovered culture who are very aesthetically sophisticated (call them the Atlanteans). Suppose this love life inspires an art work which baffles or bores most Brits, but were it to be observed by Atlanteans it would be adored and hailed as a masterpiece, alongside their own masterpieces. Do its aesthetic values, if it has any, correspond to the judgments of the home culture in this instance, or to the culture that gets the most out of experiencing the work, or are these values relative to cultures so that in Britain the work is bad and in the land of the Atlanteans

the work is excellent? Do the judgments of the Brits who think the art work is bad, and the judgments of the Atlanteans who think it is good, constitute a faultless disagreement?

A cultural relativist can say here that the values are relative to cultures, and in doing so can vindicate appreciation of the work in one culture and dissatisfaction with it in the other: this may constitute a faultless disagreement. But perhaps it is not safe to assume that the judgments of the foreign culture would be based on a correct interpretation of the work. If an ant creates a pattern in the sand that happens to look to us like a portrait of Winston Churchill, we would nevertheless be mistaken to consider this to be a drawing of Winston Churchill. As Putnam explains, its resemblance to Churchill is neither necessary nor sufficient for it to represent Churchill.<sup>178</sup> Similarly, the resemblance of the content of an art work to the common experiences of a culture is neither necessary nor sufficient for it to really be about such experiences. This may mean that the Atlanteans only enjoy the work by misinterpreting it as being about social practices common to their culture.

To be in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience it will be necessary to hold certain true beliefs about the object of one's experience, and perhaps the Atlanteans fall short of ideal circumstances relative to the work in question by lacking the knowledge that it is about the strange romantic adventures of a Brit. As far as the Atlanteans are concerned, the work is about ordinary love, but in fact it is about the (relatively) unusual experiences of love had by one British artist. The positive aesthetic experiences of the Atlanteans may, for this reason, fail to indicate the aesthetic values possessed by the work. Rather, the negative experiences of Brits who correctly interpret the work as being about the artist's relatively

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<sup>178</sup> PUTNAM, Hilary. Brains in a Vat. In STEHR, Nico, and GRUNDMANN, Reiner (eds.) *Knowledge: Critical Concepts 1*, Taylor & Francis, 2005: 192-207; p. 192.

unusual experiences of love indicate that the work is bad. It surprisingly lends itself to being misinterpreted as a masterpiece by other cultures, but it does nothing for those who correctly interpret it. Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism can therefore offer a plausible explanation of this thought experiment, and so there is no need to appeal to Cultural Relativism. But I will now turn to what might be a real example of this sort of case.

### 5.4.1 Artistic Constructivism

The poems of William McGonagall are widely believed to be terrible attempts at serious poetry, but they are also widely sought out as a source of amusement, unlike most bad poetry.<sup>179</sup> Perhaps their popularity as objects of amusement is due to their appropriation as works of comedy: although the poems are failed attempts at serious poetry and (as far as I know) do not represent an attempt on McGonagall's part to amuse readers, perhaps the exhibition of them to be ridiculed and enjoyed as comedy is the creation of a new work, not by McGonagall but perhaps partly about him.

This idea is sometimes called *Constructivism*, for example by Phillip Percival who argues that widespread interpretations of a work of art might change its aesthetic properties. Perhaps something like this has happened with McGonagall's poems, so that for each amusingly bad poem there are two works of art: the bad poem, which properly understood does not provide critics in ideal circumstances with very valuable aesthetic experiences; and the funny poem, which when taken by a critic in ideal circumstances to be a piece of 'found art', exhibited by an aesthetic community rather than McGonagall himself, for the amusement of the reader, has the capacity to create valuable experiences of amusement.

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<sup>179</sup> See *McGonagall Online*. Extra Connections Ltd., 2014 [viewed 25 August 2014]. Available from: <http://www.mcgonagall-online.org.uk/>.

Constructivism allows us to say that in certain cases of apparent faultless disagreement there is no real disagreement. For example, if one ideal aesthetic experiencer judges McGonagall's work to be almost devoid of any sort of value and another judges the poems to be hilarious, it may be that each of them is evaluating a different work, constructed by interpretation, and so there is no disagreement.

Returning briefly to the hypothetical case, the Atlanteans may do something similar when they adopt the bad British art and see it as a depiction of their own human condition: they might create a new work about which their beliefs are true, and whose value is constituted by the values of the aesthetic experiences it elicits for Atlantean ideal aesthetic experiencers. Perhaps when the Atlanteans adopt the work it becomes a new work with greater value than the work from which it originates.

Rather than the same work having different aesthetic values relative to different cultures, this would be a case of the same object being a different work of art in different contexts depending on the interpretive behaviour of different cultures. Distinct works of art can have distinct sets of aesthetic values, and so again the differing evaluations of different cultures may both be vindicated. Perhaps this would constitute a faultless disagreement between cultures, or perhaps merely something close but which is not quite a disagreement since each culture evaluates a different work. Either way, Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism could appeal to Constructivism to explain such apparent cases of faultless aesthetic disagreement.

If Constructivism turns out to be false, however, rather than reverting to Cultural Relativism, it seems better to adopt Levinson's view that aesthetic values involve enduring, broad, cross-cultural appeal (see §3.3.1). A work of art that cannot be well-received across cultures

may simply not be a great work of art, no matter how beloved it might be by its home culture. If it were necessary to be from the English speaking world in order to appreciate the works of Shakespeare, then we would have greatly overestimated the aesthetic values of his works. If that seems implausible one need only remember that the aesthetic values of works of art are, on my account, contingent, and in fact it seems that the works of Shakespeare are widely appreciated across cultures. I will now consider a separate objection to forms of Aesthetic Objectivism, involving again the issue of cultural differences leading to divergent aesthetic value judgments.

#### 5.4.2 Universal Interest in the Aesthetic

If it is possible to construct a work's *identity* by being disposed to respond to it in certain ways, a related worry is that the aesthetic *values* of a work may be constructed in the same manner, and this may justify a strong form of Aesthetic Subjectivism. In particular, it has seemed to some authors that aesthetic values are only important to particular social classes at particular times in history, and that this may be best explained by aesthetic values being socially constructed, rather than something objective that people from all sorts of backgrounds could discover in a work.<sup>180</sup> This is a claim that Stecker attributes to Terry Eagleton.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> My responses in this section to Eagleton may also apply to a similar line of argument put forward in SHUSTERMAN, Richard. Of the scandal of taste: Social privilege as nature in the aesthetic theories of Hume and Kant. *Philosophical Forum*, 20:3, 1989:211-229.

See also SHUSTERMAN for a similar view to this.

<sup>181</sup> STECKER 2006, p.2.

Eagleton considers the definition of *literature* as writing of a kind which can be aesthetically valuable.<sup>182</sup> This seems to me a good definition, consistent with my definition of art in general as consisting of objects produced in order to be aesthetically valuable. Some art is bad, so it seems an object does not need to be positively aesthetically valuable in order to be a work of art, but it seems it must be of a kind which could be positively aesthetically valuable but which falls short of this: a bad work of art is a work which is supposed to produce positively valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances, but which fails to do so, either completely or to a significant degree. Literature is at the very least artistic writing, and so it consists of textual objects of a certain type, tokens of which can be aesthetically valuable.

But Eagleton is concerned with the extent to which aesthetic value judgments vary, and he suggests that they vary according to variations in ideology, ideology being a product of power-structures, and a tool of class control:

*If it will not do to see literature as an 'objective', descriptive category, neither will it do to say that literature is just what people whimsically choose to call literature. For there is nothing at all whimsical about such kinds of value-judgement: they have their roots in deeper structures of belief which are as apparently unshakeable as the Empire State building. What we have uncovered so far, then, is not only that literature does not exist in the sense that insects do, and that the value-judgements by which it is constituted are historically variable, but that these value-judgements themselves have a close relation to social ideologies. They refer in the end not simply to private taste,*

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<sup>182</sup> EAGLETON, Terry. *Literary theory: An introduction*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996; p. 9.

*but to the assumptions by which certain social groups exercise and maintain power over others.*<sup>183</sup>

Stecker interprets Eagleton as claiming that aesthetic values are a social construction, “important only to a particular class at a particular period in history, as a means of maintaining their special social status.”<sup>184</sup> Whether that interpretation is faithful or not I am not sure, but the general notion that aesthetic values are a social construction is a challenge to my Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism that I will now resist. I expressed sympathy in the previous section for the notion that aesthetic communities can construct, through interpretation, new works of art but not that cultures can construct, through evaluation, new aesthetic values of a work.

Eagleton does seem to be claiming that certain cultural circumstances determine our aesthetic value judgments, which in turn determine what counts as literature. Aesthetic value judgments on my account are assessments of a work’s aesthetic capacities, not expressions of ideological influences. A view such as Eagleton’s is in spirit admirably anti-chauvinistic, but this seems often to lead unnecessarily into implausible forms of Relativism or Subjectivism, as I will now argue.

### 5.4.3 Cross-Cultural Aesthetic Values

Consider social class differences, which relate to what Eagleton says about ideology as a tool of social class control and a determiner of aesthetic value judgments. For as long as it has existed, Hip-Hop music has been associated with ‘street culture’, which seems to mean people of a certain social class: originally, marginalised New Yorkers of African or Caribbean

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<sup>183</sup> EAGLETON 1996, p. 14.

<sup>184</sup> STECKER 2006, p. 2.

descent, and now many people throughout the world who are often from ethnic minorities or disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>185</sup> Performers and listeners are by no means exclusively from such backgrounds, but there seems to be a strong association between this style of music and people from less privileged social classes, just as there seems to be an association between the appreciation or performance of Classical styles of music and more privileged social classes. It seems, then, that members of different social classes aesthetically appreciate art, albeit sometimes different styles of art.

If critical judgments were the product of tools of social class control we might expect, as Stecker interprets Eagleton as claiming, the aesthetic to be something of interest only to the ruling classes. But the case of Hip-Hop suggests that while this theory might be borne of anti-chauvinism it ironically demotes the appreciation of the lower classes for some of their favourite works of art to a non-aesthetic status: classical music connoisseurs, presumably, are thought to be considering the perceived aesthetic merits of music, whereas fans of Hip-Hop are apparently doing something else when they make critical judgments of music.

A fan of Hip-Hop might not express their appreciation of Hip-Hop in the way that a scholar of Classical music might express their aesthetic appreciation, but it seems obvious that their appreciation of Hip-Hop is aesthetic and that it is at least partly the aesthetic features of Hip-Hop that are important to them. Popular music can be appreciated for reasons of fashion or group identity, but it would probably not be so appreciated if it were not also appreciated (rightly or wrongly) for its rhymes, rhythms, tunefulness or other aesthetic features: the very same sorts of features appreciated in more 'high-brow' styles of music.

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<sup>185</sup> See, for example, CHANG, Jeff. *Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation*. Macmillan, 2007.

This is only one example of perceived aesthetic value being appreciated by members of various social backgrounds, but it is plausible that this is more generally true. Different art is important to different groups, but the values of art appear to be important to people regardless of their social background or the age in which they live; aesthetic appreciation seems to be part of human nature (I discussed this in §3.4.5).

Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism states that aesthetic values are capacities to produce valuable aesthetic experiences, and on this account it seems implausible that aesthetic values are only important to particular social classes at particular times in history; the aesthetic is important to the human species. Music, for example, is prehistoric: human beings have crafted musical instruments for over 40,000 years.<sup>186</sup> This does not prove that music is more a product of human nature than social nurture, but it does seem likely that as humans we had certain capacities for enjoyment that we produced music in order to satisfy and not that we produced music and then acquired a taste for it. Art more generally seems to be something we produce in order to satisfy a pre-existing thirst for the activation of certain human capacities for enjoyable experience.

Of course, one might reject Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism and doubt that aesthetic values-as-capacities are in fact present in performances or works of music, literature or other art forms, and such doubt would permit a view such as Eagleton's according to which we merely socially construct the concept of the aesthetic. I consider some such sceptical arguments and theories in the next chapter.

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<sup>186</sup> See HIGHAM, Thomas, et al. Testing models for the beginnings of the Aurignacian and the advent of figurative art and music: The radiocarbon chronology of Geißenklösterle. *Journal of human evolution*, 62:6, 2012: 664-676.

## 5.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have acknowledged the possibility that critics in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience might disagree about the aesthetic values of a work of art. I have argued that such disagreements are not straightforwardly faultless, but rather involve blameless limitations of perspective which might cause misapprehension, even in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience, of the full range of the aesthetic capacities of a work relative to human sensibilities which differ. This may amount to a coarse-grained Aesthetic Relativism which preserves the notion of critical expertise and the claim that errors of aesthetic judgment are widespread. In the next chapter I defend my account from scepticism about the existence of aesthetic values and the descriptivism of aesthetic value judgments.

## 6. Aesthetic Scepticism

### 6.0 Introduction

In this short chapter I argue that Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism is neither susceptible to an Error Theory nor to Non-Cognitivism about aesthetic value judgments. I thus continue my defence of Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism from objections and rival Meta-Aesthetical positions. I also consider an argument to the effect that aesthetic evaluation is more of an emotional process than my account might allow. I conclude that the aesthetic capacities my account posits are not queer entities, and their ontological objectivity is independent of whether or not aesthetic evaluations are cognitive or emotional.

### 6.1 Aesthetic Error Theory

The necessary and sufficient conditions for an art work to be aesthetically valuable are, on my account, that it be apt to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. My account is false if such aptness is insufficient for a work to be aesthetically valuable: that is, if something else is required for a work of art to be aesthetically valuable. John Mackie argues that for something to be morally or aesthetically valuable it would need to be *objectively prescriptive*: there would need to be an objective state of affairs which has the power to make demands on us.<sup>187</sup> For example, for it to be wrong to torture kittens, there would need to be facts about kitten torture that effectively tell us not to enact it. People can tell us not to torture kittens, but Mackie finds the notion that facts could do this a ‘queer’ notion.<sup>188</sup> Mackie focuses on moral values but suggests that the same

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<sup>187</sup> MACKIE, John. *Ethics: Inventing right and wrong*. Penguin UK, 1986; pp. 41-2.

<sup>188</sup> MACKIE 1986, p. 38.

considerations apply to aesthetic values.<sup>189</sup> Presumably his concern is that the fact that something is beautiful would have to be a fact that demands our appreciation, in a way that inert states of affairs seem not to.

Mackie's scepticism about value is an *Error Theory* because he claims that our moral and aesthetic judgments are truth-apt cognitive judgments which are invariably false due to reality containing no aesthetic or moral facts. Mackie rejects value talk as a bogus form of enquiry akin perhaps to religious or supernatural enquiry.<sup>190</sup> An Error Theory about the spiritual, for instance, would say that claims about the spiritual are false because there are no spiritual facts: such facts would be queer entities and it is unlikely that our naturalistic ontology ought to include them. Mackie argues that morality and aesthetic criticism rest on this kind of error: they imply the existence of that which probably does not exist.

But it seems that Mackie is wrong to suggest that the ontological objectivity of values requires prescriptivity. McDowell responds to Mackie by defending the claim that being "there to be experienced" is sufficient for the ontological objectivity of values.<sup>191</sup> For something to be there to be experienced it must be discoverable rather than something that our experiences invent, and so for values to be objective according to McDowell they need only be things that are reflected by our evaluations rather than generated by them. Opponents of Mackie are not committed to bogus value talk, because it is possible that value talk is about dispositional values which, despite being secondary qualities, are nevertheless there to be experienced and are therefore objective. This is McDowell's response to Mackie and in the case of aesthetic values it seems a good response because it

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<sup>189</sup> MACKIE 1986, p. 15.

<sup>190</sup> MACKIE 1986, p. 35.

<sup>191</sup> MCDOWELL 1988, pp. 168-70.

seems implausible that aesthetic values are disconnected from our aesthetic experiences, and at the same time it seems plausible that there are objective standards as to what sorts of experience count as bestowing value upon works of art.

This relates to the order of determination which I discussed in chapters 3 and 4: it seems that being there to be experienced and to determine our experiences of discovery is necessary for something to be ontologically objective, but is it sufficient? I will now further explain why it seems that aesthetic values as dispositions are not vulnerable to an Error Theory.

### 6.1.1 Objectivity without Prescriptivity

Aesthetic Objectivism may be immune to Mackie's argument from queerness in a way that Moral Objectivism is not. The discoverability of moral values might not be sufficient for their objectivity. Facts about what ought to be done might require what Mackie describes as a queer property of "to-be-pursuedness"; in other words, objective facts about what actions ought to be pursued may well need to be facts that somehow prescribe actions.<sup>192</sup> But facts about the aesthetic values of works of art may not be facts about what ought to be done, so it is not clear that Mackie is right to assume that if Moral Objectivism is susceptible to his argument from queerness, then so is Aesthetic Objectivism.

In chapter 4 I explained that works of art are, on my account, aesthetically valuable insofar as they are apt to produce distinctively aesthetic experiences which are non-aesthetically valuable. As McDowell suggests, dispositional values, such as a work of art's dispositions to produce valuable aesthetic experiences, may be objective just in virtue of being there to be experienced, in a way that does not require the "queer" notion of objective prescriptivity

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<sup>192</sup> MACKIE 1986, p. 40.

that Mackie is concerned with.<sup>193</sup> But the non-aesthetic values of aesthetic experiences may themselves be susceptible to the argument from queerness: perhaps for an aesthetic experience to be valuable it must possess a property of to-be-pursuedness.

But such a sceptical challenge, when applied to my Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism, would seem to exaggerate what I am claiming: I only claim that some experiences are aesthetic, and some such experiences are more enjoyable than others, due to the sensibilities of one who has them coming into contact with certain salient properties of the objects of one's experience. My ontology does not contain objectively prescriptive experience values; it contains human beings with a capacity to enjoy some things more than others, and it contains sensible properties of works of art which in circumstances of epistemic objectivity cause human beings to have aesthetic experiences of various kinds and involving various degrees of enjoyment.

There need be no to-be-pursuedness inherent in valuable aesthetic experiences; they may just be experiences that involve aesthetic pleasure. This allows for conditional prescriptions such as 'if you want aesthetic pleasure then you ought to seek out ideal aesthetic experiences of work W.' I am attracted to, but not committed to, the stronger claim that such pleasure is a morally good-making feature of these experiences, as pleasure is in general within a Utilitarian moral framework. If Moral Objectivism could survive the argument from queerness, no further defense would need to be made on behalf of Aesthetic Objectivism so long as aesthetic pleasure is construed as a morally good-making feature of acts of aesthetic engagement with works of art. But for brevity I must leave aside here a defense of Moral Objectivism or Realism from the Error Theory and say that, if the

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<sup>193</sup> MACKIE 1986, p. 40.

argument from queerness succeeds in Meta-Ethics, this at least does not change the fact that the capacities of art works and human beings make some works of art better than others in terms of their potency as providers of aesthetic pleasure for humans.

As McDowell observed, comparing values to secondary qualities, as Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism does, goes some way towards undermining Mackie's argument from queerness, as there seems to be nothing particularly queer about secondary qualities. A property to which a response-dependent concept applies can be construed as a dispositional property, for example something is red if and only if it looks red in certain conditions, and redness may therefore be a disposition to produce appearances of redness. Primary qualities are thought to be non-dispositional. Primary qualities are also objective in the sense that they are there to be experienced, and are not figments of our imaginations. Secondary qualities might also be objective in that sense; their dispositional character does not entail that they are not there to be experienced. Mackie's Error Theory does not seem to pose a serious threat to a dispositional theory of aesthetic values.

I do not wish to defend a dispositional theory of moral values, and Error Theory may or may not be a serious challenge for the objectivity of moral values, but that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I turn now to a different sort of scepticism about values, which is directed at value judgments.

## 6.2 Non-Cognitivism

In defending the moderate objectivity of aesthetic values in art, I have assumed so far that we make judgments that are about such values: aesthetic values are attempts to describe the aesthetic values of art, and they can be true or false. I will now consider whether this is right, and whether this affects Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism.

*Non-Cognitivism* is the view that judgments in a particular domain are not truth-apt: they can neither be true nor false because they are not attempts to describe anything. Non-cognitivist theories of value go by the name of *Expressivism*, a broad category of views which state that value judgments are expressive of non-belief-like mental states.<sup>194</sup> A notable member of the category is *Emotivism*: the view that value judgments are expressions of emotion rather than descriptions of values.<sup>195</sup> For example, if I claim that ‘It is wrong to set fire to cats for fun’, an emotivist might claim that what I am doing is effectively ‘booing’ the burning of cats for fun: I am merely expressing my negative emotions towards that behaviour.

Another type of expressivist might claim more broadly that my utterance has at least a component which is expressive of some mental state which does not function descriptively like a belief, and perhaps this is all I do in making my utterance: perhaps I am simply not making a claim about the world being thus-and-so.<sup>196</sup> Insofar as my utterance is expressive rather than descriptive, it cannot be true or false and is therefore non-cognitive; or rather the non-belief-like state, whether it be an emotion or something else expressed by my utterance, is a non-cognitive state.

Expressivist theories usually share with Error Theory the claim that there are no ontologically objective values, so even if value judgments were descriptive, there would be nothing for them to describe. Error Theory states that value judgments are descriptive and therefore, since nothing is valuable, they are always false. Expressivists deny Descriptivism

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<sup>194</sup> SINCLAIR, Neil. Recent work in expressivism. *Analysis*, 69:1, 2009: 136-147.

<sup>195</sup> See, for example, STOLJAR, Daniel. Emotivism and truth conditions. *Philosophical Studies*, 70:1, 1993: 81-101.

<sup>196</sup> SINCLAIR 2009, p. 136.

(see §1.3.3), so on their view value judgments are not true but nor are they false.<sup>197</sup>

Emotional or other non-belief-like states can perhaps be more or less appropriate, in some sense, but unlike cognitive states they cannot be true or false.

Expressivist theories in Meta-Ethics are sometimes said to explain the imperative function of moral discourse. Suppose I see some children setting fire to a cat and I say: 'that is wrong!' It seems that part of what I am doing is trying to make the children share my attitude of disapproval and perhaps experience shame as a result, or at least try to extinguish the cat and refrain from setting fire to any other cats. I am, in other words, attempting to co-ordinate the behaviour of these children, and this according to some Expressivists is the function of moral discourse: the co-ordination of behaviour, not the description of normativity in the world.<sup>198</sup>

So far so plausible: it is as if I have said 'setting fire to cats?!?!' as opposed to claiming that the state of the world is such that setting fire to cats has the property of being morally wrong. The latter claim would perhaps not have the desired effect on the behaviour of the pyromaniac children, because it is a *mere* description. Just as it might seem queer that a state of affairs could make demands on us, it might seem that a description of such a state of affairs cannot, without some additional expressive component, motivate others to behave differently. It may have no more effect on the children's behaviour than a description of the physiology of cats, whereas an exclamation may have the necessary impact to make the children reconsider their actions. Perhaps, then, moral judgments as tools for the co-ordination of behaviour are best understood as expressions of non-cognitive

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<sup>197</sup> SINCLAIR 2009, p. 136.

<sup>198</sup> SINCLAIR 2009, p. 136.

states, since such expressions, it seems, would fare better than statements of belief in altering the behaviour of others.

It is not wise, however, to assume that such observations about the function of moral discourse will be just as true of other kinds of value discourse. Are aesthetic value judgments tools for the co-ordination of behaviour? Perhaps: in stating that 'this painting is beautiful' I might be attempting to make others view the painting, notice features of it, respond to it as I do and share my attitude towards it. But perhaps not: I might simply be describing the painting as being beautiful. The case for saying otherwise seems weaker in the aesthetic case since all sides agree that moral discourse is to do with behaviour, whereas discourse purportedly about the values of art is not obviously to do with behaviour rather than just to do with works of art. Having briefly expressed a scepticism towards Aesthetic Expressivism, I will now explain why it is not necessary for me to argue against such a view: Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism is consistent with Non-Cognitivism about aesthetic value judgments, so non-cognitivist arguments are no objection.

### 6.2.1 Non-Cognitivist Objectivism

On my account aesthetic values are objective just in the sense that they are dispositions possessed by works of art independently of how we are disposed to respond to them. Our dispositions to respond do, however, shape our aesthetic value concepts and determine the status of certain objective dispositions of works as values of those works. This account includes a Response-Dependence analysis of aesthetic value concepts, but it may nevertheless be consistent with an analysis of aesthetic value judgments according to which they do not describe works as falling under concepts, but rather express non-cognitive mental states, as Expressivism would entail.

An object can be disposed to induce a state of mind in an observer, even if the observer never does more than express this state of mind as one might sigh to express tiredness. The fact that the object is disposed to have this effect may be a describable, objective fact, but in practice it might be that aesthetic discourse is not used to describe it, and is merely used for expressive purposes.

One might object at this point that if aesthetic judgments are not attempts to represent aesthetic facts, but merely expressions of non-cognitive mental states, then we may have no access to such facts. But epistemic access to the fact that P is not necessary for it to be the case that P. One can be in a state of appropriate engagement with or appreciation of the values in a work of art, without being aware that one is in such a state. Suppose that a painting is elegant, and elegance is a capacity to produce a certain aesthetic satisfaction in ideal circumstances. That satisfaction may be caused by the work without one judging that the work has the capacity to cause it. Epistemic Access to the fact that the painting is elegant is not necessary for one to be satisfied by its elegance.

So even if all one ever does when one speaks of elegance is express such satisfaction, this is consistent with there being a capacity to cause the satisfaction which is the work's elegance. As Walter Sinnott-Armstrong explains, expressivist and realist theories each tend to combine claims about metaphysics, semantics, epistemology and so on.<sup>199</sup> Realism about values normally combines, among other things, the metaphysical claim that there are objective values, with the semantic claim that value judgments are true if and only if they correspond to objective values. Expressivism about value judgments normally combines, among other claims, the metaphysical claim that there are no objective values, with the

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<sup>199</sup> SINNOTT-ARMSTRONG, Walter. Mixed-up Meta-ethics. *Philosophical Issues*, 19:1, 2009: 235-256.

semantic claim that value judgments are not apt for truth by correspondence to objective values.<sup>200</sup>

It is not immediately clear why one cannot take the metaphysical claim from one camp and combine it with the semantic claim from the other. Mackie does this, by claiming both that value judgments are a true if and only if they correspond to objective values, and that there are no such values.<sup>201</sup> I propose that it is similarly coherent to claim both that there are objective aesthetic values and that aesthetic value judgments are not apt for truth by correspondence with them.

### 6.2.2 Non-Cognitivist Ideal Observer Theory

Not only is Non-Cognitivism potentially compatible with Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism, but ideal observer theories in general, including my own, could be construed as versions of Expressivism. Gilbert Harman argues that expressivist or non-cognitivist theories including Emotivism, unlike the view that value is entirely in the eye of the beholder, are compatible with the existence of universal values.<sup>202</sup> This is because it is possible that all human beings are hard-wired to have similar emotional (or other) responses to certain things. Harman refers to moral values but the same option is available for aesthetic values: my appreciation of a work of art might be an indication that the work is disposed to produce positive feelings in all observers under similar circumstances. Not only might I approve of the work, but it might actually be universally good in the sense that it can be experienced as such by anyone who observes it.

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<sup>200</sup> SINNOT-ARMSTRONG 2009, p.235.

<sup>201</sup> MACKIE 1986

<sup>202</sup> HARMAN, Gilbert. *The nature of morality: An introduction to ethics*, 1977; p. 30.

Hume claims that aesthetic value judgments are based on sentimental reactions to objects. Sentiments, he claims, do not represent anything, but they can nevertheless be more or less in conformity with the nature of the object which arouses them; they can indicate a "match", as Railton puts it, between the nature of the object and the cognitive or sensory faculties of the observer.<sup>203</sup> The sentiments of the ideal critic in ideal circumstances, on Hume's account, will conform as closely as possible to the way the object is; or rather, the way it appears within constraints set by the general nature of human beings.<sup>204</sup> These sentiments will therefore be a reliable indication of the aesthetic values of works of art, even if they do not in any way describe works as being thus-and-so.

Hume may or may not have agreed with the "species of philosophy" he describes in presenting the paradox of taste, that the relevant aesthetic responses are non-representational sentiments which can mark "a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind."<sup>205</sup> It seems, however, that in resolving the paradox this notion can be preserved: that the responses of critics in ideal circumstances can indicate, without representing, a match between certain properties of works of art and certain features of human sensibility.

One way of describing Hume's mingling of feelings and understanding is, therefore, as a modified version of Expressivism or Emotivism. Expressivist theories including Emotivism seem to say that value judgments are not claims about objective values, and so our talk about values does not imply the existence of any such values. But according to Harman's interpretation of Emotivism, in expressing the relevant kind of attitude, a speaker implies

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<sup>203</sup> RAILTON 2001, p. 81.

<sup>204</sup> HUME 1985, p. 236.

<sup>205</sup> HUME 1985, pp. 229-30.

that the attitude is appropriate and justified, at least from a certain point of view.<sup>206</sup> Hume explains how this might be the case. Many of our passions are based on beliefs, and beliefs can be mistaken. For example, feelings of trust can be based on beliefs about trustworthiness. If a passion is based on a mistaken belief, then we can say that the passion is in some sense mistaken.<sup>207</sup>

Aesthetic value judgments, then, need not be expressions of cognitive states in order to be indicative of the objective aesthetic values of art, and this is the basic reason for resisting the Anti-Objectivism that tends to accompany non-cognitivist theories in Meta-Ethics and Meta-Aesthetics. Consider this illustration. Suppose that I am afraid of the tiger in front of me. My feeling of fear is, or forms part of, an intentional state whose object is a tiger. My state of fear indicates the presence of its object: I am afraid because there is a tiger; my fear of the tiger implies that there is a tiger that I am afraid of, assuming normal circumstances apply.

Now suppose that I find a painting beautiful. My finding it beautiful is similar to the above: there is a painting, I have some sort of response to the painting; my response indicates at least that it is apt to make me respond this way in present circumstances. Perhaps in the right circumstances my response to the painting indicates its beauty, just as my fear of the tiger indicates a tiger or danger.

My fear of a tiger might not *represent* the tiger as dangerous, and yet *indicate* that it is. It is at least conceivable that a feeling of fear in response to a tiger could lack propositional content: I would not have to believe that the tiger is dangerous in order to feel this fear;

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<sup>206</sup> HARMAN 1977, p. 46.

<sup>207</sup> HUME, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*, NORTON, David Fate, and NORTON, Mary J. Norton (eds.) Clarendon Press, 2007: Book 2, Part 3, Section 3, Paragraph 7.

perhaps I am aware that the tiger is under sedation and cannot harm me or anyone else, and yet I am naturally disposed to react to it with a feeling of fear.

My finding a painting beautiful also may or may not involve propositional content: by responding as I do, I perhaps judge that the painting is beautiful; or perhaps I simply respond as I might to a tiger in the sense that the painting is the cause of my response without my response being *about* it in any propositional sense.

### 6.2.3 Realist-Expressivism

An example of an attempt to combine *Realism* and Expressivism comes from David Copp, who defends the possibility of *Realist-Expressivism* for moral values. He compares moral terms to the word 'cur', the meaning of which is largely but not entirely captured by the phrase 'mongrel dog'.<sup>208</sup> Copp suggests that when saying 'cur' or making a moral claim, one expresses a belief such as 'this is a mongrel dog' or 'this act is morally wrong' and implies further states of mind with regards to the object of the claim: for example, disliking the dog or disapproving of the act. He suggests therefore that moral discourse is expressivist because moral judgments do express non-cognitive states, but moral discourse is also descriptivist because moral judgments also express cognitive states. For example, when I say it is wrong to burn cats I perhaps describe features of the act while simultaneously expressing an attitude of disapproval towards the act.

As well as being consistent with the descriptivist element of Realism (see §1.1 for the tripartite definition of realism I am employing here), Copp's view may also be consistent with the objectivity of moral values, and it being objectively morally wrong to burn cats:

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<sup>208</sup> COPP, David. Realist-expressivism: A neglected option for moral realism. *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 18:2, 2001: 1-43.

expressivist semantics does not imply expressivist metaphysics. Realist-Expressivism has an explanatory advantage: as I explained in §2.2, thick value predicates combine a descriptive and an evaluative component, and Realist-Expressivism can say that judgments deploying such predicates simultaneously describe something and express one's attitude towards it. If this evaluative-descriptive practice is something we engage in, then this explains why we have thick value concepts. But whether such a view can allow for the objectivity of values in combination with the expressivity of value judgments is a separate matter.

Copp's view or another hybrid view may or may not succeed in Ethics or Aesthetics, but the possibility for success partly undermines the challenge to forms of Aesthetic Objectivism from Aesthetic Non-Cognitivism, because it is not certain that Non-Cognitivism about value judgments entails Anti-Objectivism about values. I am inclined to assume that aesthetic value judgments are cognitive expressions of belief, but Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism does not seem to depend on this assumption because it is primarily about the ontological objectivity of aesthetic values as capacities, not the descriptivity of aesthetic value judgments. To make this clearer I will now consider how ideal observer theories in particular, such as my own, could be reconciled with Non-Cognitivism.

Supposing that aesthetic judgments are cognitive it is still quite possible that aesthetic value judgments are not about the capacities of art works to please ideal aesthetic experiencers. For example, '*Toast of London* is a funny TV show' does not intuitively translate as 'in ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of *Toast of London*, one would experience amusement upon observing it.' This, however, merely renders the project of defending Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism a revisionary project rather than a descriptive one. It may be the case that the only sense in which a work of art is ever beautiful is that it is apt to

produce worthwhile aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. This aptness can be identified with concepts such as 'beauty' as deployed in ordinary aesthetic value judgments; this is a fleshing out of what we mean by 'beauty', or possibly a revision of how the term is normally understood.

I turn now to arguments for the more general claim that aesthetic value judgments are essentially emotional, which might suggest either that aesthetic value judgments are non-cognitive or that aesthetic values are entirely subjective.

### 6.2.5 Emotional Evaluation

I have suggested that the ontological objectivity of dispositional aesthetic values is consistent with aesthetic value judgments functioning as expressions of non-cognitive mental states. But I have not yet said enough to dispel the notion that this is the primary function of aesthetic discourse and that there is nothing about works of art themselves, independently of our mental states, to substantiate the feelings or attitudes we have towards them. Jesse Prinz argues that aesthetic evaluations are themselves emotional: they do not merely express emotions, and they do not merely describe a work's capacity to induce emotions, but aesthetic appreciation is itself an emotional state.<sup>209</sup> This view seems plausible to the extent that aesthetic experiences are very often, if not always, emotional experiences: it seems that great art can in ideal circumstances move us to tears, for example, and that in other circumstances bad art can also do this, such as art which is overly sentimental. If Prinz is right, this might suggest an Extreme Subjectivism according to which our emotions make objects evaluable one way or another, or it might suggest a form of

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<sup>209</sup> PRINZ, Jesse. Emotion and aesthetic value. *American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting, San Francisco, CA, April* [online], 2007a [viewed 16 September 2014]. Available from: <http://subcortex.com/EmotionAndAestheticValuePrinz.pdf>.

Expressivism according to which our aesthetic evaluations as emotional states cannot describe works of art as being one way or another.

Prinz cites evidence that feelings influence our aesthetic value judgments.<sup>210</sup> This influence might be best explained by what Hume and Kant identified about aesthetic value judgments: they are based on one's subjective feelings in response to an object. But Prinz goes further in claiming that aesthetic value judgments are not just based on feelings, but they are themselves emotional states: we evaluate art with feeling, not just on the basis of feeling.<sup>211</sup>

Suppose that the empirical evidence does demonstrate that aesthetic value judgments are typically emotional. Should they be? We are typically subject to biases in our assessment of current affairs that we learn about through the prism of news media, but it seems that where possible we should try to form judgments that are not swayed by such prejudice. In the sciences also it is appropriate to take a dispassionate approach when forming judgments of, say, cause and effect. In Ethics too it may be the case that the appropriate level of impartiality is only achieved if one sets one's feelings to one side. Prinz himself believes that moral judgments too are emotional states, but it certainly seems that there are types of judgment that ought to be dispassionate, and so if Prinz is right there must be something distinctive about value judgments in this respect.<sup>212</sup> Aesthetic value judgments are distinctive but do feelings play a special role in them?

On my account feelings do play a special role in ideal aesthetic value judgments that they do not play in ideal scientific judgments, but this role is as part of the subject matter of the

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<sup>210</sup> PRINZ 2007a, pp. 2-4.

<sup>211</sup> PRINZ 2007a, pp. 4-6.

<sup>212</sup> See PRINZ, Jesse. *The Emotional Construction of Morals*. Oxford University Press, 2007b.

judgments, not as part of the judgments themselves. Aesthetic value judgments are assessments of a work's capacity to cause aesthetic responses including emotional responses. But such assessments should not themselves be emotional; they should be dispassionate judgments about cause and effect. Emotional experiences are relevant to our observations about the aesthetic values of art: art can be valuable partly insofar as it can make us feel certain emotions in ideal circumstances. This is distinct from Prinz's claim that aesthetic evaluations are themselves emotional states.

Prinz considers a view such as mine, according to which we should dispassionately evaluate a work's capacity to elicit emotion when we perform aesthetic evaluations. His response is as follows:

*If the units used to assess art were not affective in nature, then it's not clear why we should call them units of goodness.*<sup>213</sup>

He seems to be saying that if we assess art with feeling this explains why we consider such assessments to be evaluations of a work as being good or bad: when we rate a work highly we express that it feels good to experience the work. But if positive and negative emotions can help to explain something's being evaluable as good or bad, it is unclear why this cannot be so on my dispositional account: a work may be good or bad partly depending on the way it is disposed to make us feel, and so to assess whether a work is good or bad we must estimate its capacities to give us feelings. The subject of assessment may be (partly) the capacity to elicit emotion, but the assessment is dispassionate, and this view can make use of what Prinz regards as the explanatory role of emotions in a theory of values.

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<sup>213</sup> PRINZ 2007a, p. 8.

But suppose that Prinz is right that aesthetic evaluations are themselves unavoidably emotional and therefore at least partly non-cognitive. As I have argued, this is consistent with the existence of objective aesthetic values *qua* dispositions to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. Furthermore, positing the existence of such dispositions can account for the convergence of aesthetic judgments and our intuitions about the possibility of expertise and error in aesthetic judgment. There are facts of the matter about a work's capacities to elicit valuable aesthetic experiences, and those capacities can be identified as a work's ontologically objective aesthetic values, even if our assessments of works are (at least sometimes) too emotionally-laden to pick out such capacities with ideal epistemic objectivity.

### 6.3 Conclusions

In this chapter I have further clarified and defended Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism, which says that the aesthetic values of art are ontologically objective dispositions to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. I have argued that on this account aesthetic values in art do not possess the 'queer' prescriptivity that would make them susceptible to an Error Theory. I have also resisted non-cognitivist and subjectivist notions of the role of emotions and expression in aesthetic evaluation, arguing that my account is neutral as to whether aesthetic value judgments are cognitive, and that it fully accounts for what role there may be for emotions in the aesthetic appreciation of a work, without compromising on the ontological objectivity of aesthetic values as dispositions to produce valuable experiences, be they emotional experiences or not. I turn now to a final sort of objection, regarding the implication that if aesthetic values are objective, it ought to be possible to learn that a work has them without direct experience of them.

## 7. Aesthetic Testimony

### 7.0 Introduction

In this chapter I argue that aesthetic testimony is weak evidence of aesthetic value and that to be informative it would need to be gathered with scientific precision. And yet, I argue, this is no reason to doubt the (partial) objectivity of aesthetic values. The ontological objectivity of aesthetic values can seem to generate the expectation that learning from aesthetic testimony should be possible because learning from testimony about that which is ontologically objective usually is possible. The Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism I have defended in particular suggests that at least in principle it ought to be possible to learn that something is the bearer of a particular value by listening to the aesthetic value judgments of critics in ideal circumstances. But this is controversial and therefore the theory I am putting forward is open to question by pessimists about aesthetic testimony.

I will lay out an explicit argument against Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism which relies on Pessimism about aesthetic testimony. I will consider the coherence and plausibility of this pessimistic view, as well as reasons to favour a more optimistic view. I will attempt to provide an Error Theory about the view that one must directly experience a work of art in order to reliably evaluate it. I will defend the coherence and plausibility of Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism combined with a modest Optimism about aesthetic testimony, according to which aesthetic testimony can at least in principle provide evidence of the aesthetic values of works of art that one has not experienced. I will conclude that this evidence does not need to be strong for Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism to survive the objection from aesthetic testimony.

## 7.1 Aesthetic Objectivism and Testimony

We can normally learn about objective states of affairs indirectly, without experiencing them first-hand: for example, we can acquire knowledge by listening to teachers, to the news, by reading books and in any other situation in which we learn that P simply by being told (by a reliable source) 'P'. If the aesthetic values of works of art are objective states of affairs, then it seems at least very likely that we will be able to find out about these states of affairs just by being told about them, and without having to experience them first-hand. However, it is counter-intuitive that we can find out that a work of art is beautiful or ugly without experiencing it. '*The King's Speech* is a great film but I haven't seen it myself' would seem a strange thing to say, perhaps similar to 'It is raining but I don't think it is.' Both express propositions which may be true and yet there seems to be something wrong with asserting them or with the speaker believing them. Therefore, aesthetic values appear not to be objective, or so one might argue.

To summarise, the objection is as follows:

1. Objective states of affairs are such that we can find out that they are so via testimony.
2. If aesthetic values in art are objective states of affairs then we can find out the aesthetic values of works of art via testimony.
3. We cannot find out the aesthetic values of works of art via testimony.
4. Therefore, aesthetic values in art are not objective states of affairs.

In this chapter I argue that premise 3 in this argument is false, and therefore that this objection to Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism fails. I accept premises 1 and 2. The ways in which we can normally acquire knowledge from testimony, such that 1 is true, can tell us

something about how to acquire aesthetic knowledge from testimony. I will now consider how testimony might normally work.

## 7.2 Transmission Testimony and Evidential Testimony

When testimony succeeds in providing knowledge, one way of understanding this is to say that a testifier who knows that P transmits her warrant for believing that P to another person by asserting 'P', allowing that person to have exactly the same warrant for believing that P as the testifier. For example, suppose you ask a reliable person for directions to the train station, and they share with you their knowledge of its location. On the present account, you are then exactly as warranted as the speaker in believing that the station is where they say it is. Robert Hopkins calls this kind of testimony *transmission testimony*, because it involves the transmission of warrant from the testifier to those who receive the testimony.<sup>214</sup>

Another way of understanding the acquisition of knowledge via testimony is as the process of inferring that P from testimony that P. We routinely draw inferences from our observations, and these observations often include the testimony of others. When somebody tells me where the station is, I could regard this as a piece of evidence about its location, and consider how strong that evidence is, how it weighs up against any conflicting evidence, and attempt to draw the appropriate inferences. Testimony may in some cases provide very good evidence for something and allow one to acquire knowledge, whereas in other cases it may not be sufficient to put one in a state of knowledge. Hopkins calls this

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<sup>214</sup> HOPKINS, Robert. Beauty and testimony. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 47, 2000: 209-236, p. 222.

kind of testimony *evidential testimony*.<sup>215</sup> I will now say more about these two models of testimony and consider which might best apply to testimony about the aesthetic values of art.

Transmission testimony seems to be a somewhat passive process compared to evidential testimony, which requires that the recipient perform an inference. Suppose that I learn by transmission testimony that Osama Bin Laden has been killed: I read in a good newspaper that this has happened, and I become as warranted in believing it as the author of the article. It would seem that, supposing that such learning takes place by transmission, I now cannot help but know that Bin Laden was killed. Given that I am able to read and understand English and I am presented with a reliable article in English describing the events of Bin Laden's assassination, how might I prevent myself from being infected, as it were, by this knowledge? If I had reason to doubt the reliability of the testifier, transmission testimony might fail to take place, but otherwise warrant is transmitted from one person to another. This is slightly mysterious compared to evidential testimony.

On the evidential model of testimony, I might learn of Bin Laden's death by treating reliable journalism as a source of evidence, and a newspaper article as a piece of evidence, and infer, from whatever evidence I have gathered pertaining to the hypothesis that Bin Laden has been assassinated, that in fact he has been. How is this different from transmission of warrant? It is different because my warrant for believing that Bin Laden was killed does not necessarily equal that of the testifier, because each of our respective warrants is dependent on our distinct epistemic positions and the evidence that each of us has access to and can draw inferences from.

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<sup>215</sup> HOPKINS 2000, p. 221.

### 7.2.1 Evidential Aesthetic Testimony

Drawing inferences from evidence is something we do on many occasions, whereas the transmission of warrant is not so obviously part of our epistemic lives. But Hopkins suggests that most testimony does occur by transmission, and that aesthetic testimony is an exception to this.<sup>216</sup> He may or may not be right to claim that other testimony is done by transmission of warrant, but more importantly for present purposes, I wish to endorse his claim that aesthetic testimony is evidential.

The reason Hopkins claims that aesthetic testimony is evidential is that the receiver of testimony that something is beautiful would seem to have at least some reason to think that it might be beautiful, but certainly less reason than the person who has actually experienced its beauty.<sup>217</sup> For instance, if I tell someone who has not been to Vienna that the architecture there is beautiful, as I found it to be on my holiday there, that person at least has some small reason to think that this might be true, and it may be reasonable for them to go and see whether they agree. Alternatively, if I tell them that the Austrian flag (which they have not seen) is red and white, they may then acquire a much stronger reason to think that this is the case.

That at least is intuitively plausible, and Hopkins believes it can be explained by testimony about colour working by transmission of warrant, and testimony about beauty merely providing evidence (possibly very little evidence) that something is beautiful. The person becomes as warranted as I am in judging the colours of the flag to be red and white, but less warranted than me in believing the city to be beautiful. As I have said, Hopkins may be

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<sup>216</sup> HOPKINS 2000, p. 223.

<sup>217</sup> HOPKINS 2000, pp. 223-4.

wrong to think that judgments about things such as the colour of a flag work by transmission of warrant, but it seems clear that testimony about beauty does not involve the transmission of warrant, for this would imply an implausibly strong Optimism about aesthetic testimony: that we can, without experiencing it, be as certain that something is beautiful as someone who has experienced its beauty.

Although such an extreme Optimism seems not to be justified, I will argue that we can learn about the aesthetic values of a work of art from testimony by treating it as evidence and drawing inferences from it. This will fulfil the expectation generated by Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism that it should be possible to find out something's aesthetic values without experiencing them. In other words, the possibility of learning from evidential aesthetic testimony speaks against premise 3 in the above objection. I will now examine the premise more closely.

### 7.3 Pessimism about Aesthetic Testimony

*Pessimists* about aesthetic testimony claim that it provides little or no reason for us to form or modify aesthetic value judgments. *Optimists* deny this, and claim that aesthetic testimony can sometimes justify the formation or alteration of aesthetic value judgments. Pessimism about aesthetic testimony as a source of aesthetic knowledge seems to be a popular folk view. Suppose a teacher tells his pupils that the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066 and (on a separate occasion) that *Romeo and Juliet* is a beautiful piece of writing. It is plausible that the teacher has taught his pupils the date of the Battle of Hastings, and that they now know when this battle took place, or at least have a good reason to think it took place in 1066. They do not need to travel back in time and observe the battle to learn this

fact, or even look at the historical evidence; they can simply listen to their teacher, assuming that he is a reliable source of this piece of information.

However, I would expect fewer people to say that the teacher has taught his pupils that *Romeo and Juliet* is beautiful such that they now know that it is, and perhaps people would even doubt that the pupils have acquired a good reason to suppose that the play is beautiful. I am assuming here that the pupils have not read or seen the play. I would expect many people to claim that the pupils would need to read the play or see it performed in order to learn that it is beautiful. Whether or not I am right in my estimation of folk opinion, some philosophers do defend such pessimistic claims.

### 7.3.1 Kant's Pessimism

In the philosophical literature, Pessimism can be traced back to Kant. Kant's views on aesthetic testimony are more than a historical curiosity simply because Kant's combination of Aesthetic Objectivism (or, at least, the claim that aesthetic value judgments imply universal validity) and Pessimism about aesthetic testimony is used as a starting point for contemporary discussions of aesthetic testimony and the objectivity of aesthetic values. As I explained in §2.4, Kant offers a theory of aesthetic value judgments according to which they are based on subjective feelings and yet we can justifiably demand that others experience the same feelings in response to the same objects. To recap briefly, the relevant subjective feelings involve what Kant describes as pleasure produced by a harmony between the imagination and the understanding.

Kant also claims that aesthetic value judgments make a claim to universal validity, as I explained in §2.4. He suggests that not only do we call upon others to agree with our aesthetic value judgments, but we can reasonably expect people to respond to the same

objects in similar ways: human beings are similar enough that we can have some expectation that others will respond to the same objects with similar aesthetic experiences.<sup>218</sup> It therefore seems that the existence of ontologically objective aesthetic values (albeit relative to human sensibilities) might be implied by Kant's view that we can justifiably call upon the agreement of others with our assessments of the aesthetic values of objects. I will now explain Kant's Pessimism about aesthetic testimony.

While Kant's account of aesthetic value judgments may or may not be construed as a form of Aesthetic Objectivism, he is certainly a Pessimist about aesthetic testimony:

*The judgement of taste is not determinable by grounds of proof, just as if it were merely subjective.*

*If a man, in the first place, does not find a building, a prospect, or a poem beautiful, a hundred voices all highly praising it will not force his inmost agreement. ...that a thing has pleased others could never serve as the basis of an aesthetical judgement.*

*...Still less, in the second place, can an a priori proof determine according to definite rules a judgement about beauty. If a man reads me a poem of his or brings me to a play, which does not after all suit my taste ...certain passages which displease me may agree very well with rules of beauty (as they have been put forth by these writers and are universally recognised): but I stop my ears, I will listen to no arguments and no reasoning; and I will rather assume that these rules of the critics are false, or at least that they do not apply to the*

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<sup>218</sup> KANT 1951, pp. 75-6 (§21).

*case in question, than admit that my judgement should be determined by grounds of proof a priori.*

*...It seems that this is one of the chief reasons why this aesthetical faculty of judgement has been given the name of Taste. For though a man enumerate to me all the ingredients of a dish ...I try the dish with my tongue and my palate, and thereafter (and not according to universal principles) do I pass my judgement.<sup>219</sup>*

Kant is clearly pessimistic about the prospect that testimony about the aesthetic values of art (or indeed the niceness of food) expressed by other subjects could force us to change our own judgments or provide adequate justification for the formation or alteration of one's own aesthetic value judgments.

Kant says that it is as if such judgments were merely subjective, but he does not say that they *are* merely subjective. But although Kant does not assert that aesthetic values are subjective or relative to individual subjects, if they were this would, it seems, justify Kant's pessimistic observations. I will return shortly to Anti-Objectivist justifications of Pessimism.

For Kant, aesthetic value judgments are universally valid, and yet one cannot use the judgments of others as a basis for one's own. But as the argument I presented in §7.1 suggests, this is a difficult position to hold: if the universal validity of aesthetic value judgments is due to the objectivity of aesthetic values, it seems to be inconsistent with the Pessimism Kant defends. If there is a tension between Objectivism and Pessimism one should reject at least one of these views. I will now consider arguments to the effect that one should retain Pessimism and therefore reject Objectivism.

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<sup>219</sup> KANT 1951, pp. 125-7 (§33).

### 7.3.2 Anti-Objectivist Pessimism

If the argument in §7.1 is successful, Pessimism is true and Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism is false, as are stronger forms of Aesthetic Objectivism. I will now examine whether this combination of Aesthetic Anti-Objectivism with Pessimism about aesthetic testimony is coherent or plausible. One option is to defend an Aesthetic Error Theory, according to which all aesthetic value judgments are false. It should be clear that this would easily explain the apparent shortcomings of aesthetic testimony: we would be unable to learn of a work's aesthetic values by listening to the aesthetic value judgments of testifiers, because these judgments would in all cases be false. But for reasons given in §6.1, Aesthetic Error Theory is implausible, and although it can explain Pessimism should Pessimism turn out to be true, there may be better explanations than simply the non-existence of aesthetic values.

Fine-grained Aesthetic Relativism, such as the view that aesthetic values are relative to individual subjects, seems to be an even worse option for the pessimist. Consider the following two utterances:

1. 'I've just seen *The King's Speech*. It's a good film, you should go and see it.'
2. '*The King's Speech* is a good film, you should go and see it. I haven't seen it myself.'

Perhaps because of our inclination towards Pessimism, 2 seems to be a problematic assertion even if it expresses a proposition which is true. In this respect it is comparable to *Moore's paradox*: 'It is raining but I don't think it is' expresses a proposition which may be true and yet there seems to be something wrong with asserting it.<sup>220</sup> I am not suggesting

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<sup>220</sup> See, for example, ROSENTHAL, David M. Self-knowledge and Moore's paradox. *Philosophical Studies*, 77:2, 1995: 195-209.

that 2 necessarily *is* a Moore-paradoxical sentence, just that compared to 1 it seems odd and it may seem this way for the same reasons that Pessimism can seem plausible.

Fine-grained Aesthetic Relativism, or at least Relativism to individual subjects, will struggle to explain this difference between 1 and 2, because it will imply that 1 is also a problematic assertion even if it is true. 1 is true according to Individualistic Aesthetic Relativism if and only if the speaker has seen the film, it is good relative to her aesthetic sensibility, and it is also good for the person the statement is addressed to such that they have a reason to go and see it. However, there is a problem with the transition from asserting truthfully that one has seen a good film, to asserting truthfully that another person should see it, because according to Individualistic Relativism its goodness relative to the speaker is unrelated to its goodness relative to the addressee.

So on such a view there is reason to find 1 to be an infelicitous statement, and Pessimism provides a reason to find 2 to be an infelicitous statement, whereas intuitively 1 is a much more felicitous assertion than 2. Such a Relativist-Pessimist might respond by claiming that 1 implies that the addresser and the addressee share similar sensibilities such that the same things might be beautiful relative to them as individual subjects. This would allow the Relativist-Pessimist to say that 1 is at least in some contexts a reasonable assertion to make, whereas 2 is a problematic assertion, just as intuition seems to reveal.

But this response might be too successful, in the sense that 2 could also, at least in some contexts, be taken to imply that the addresser is referring to that which is good relative to the addressee's sensibility. Individualistic Relativism does not seem to rule out that one might take themselves to have some insight into what is good relative to another, and so such a view has trouble explaining the intuition that there is something wrong with

asserting 2. I will now consider how Aesthetic Objectivists can explain Pessimistic intuitions such as the above.

### 7.3.3 Objectivism and Pessimism

Despite advocating Pessimism, Kant provides a distinction which can help explain away intuitions that favour Pessimism. He draws a distinction between aesthetic value judgments and *judgments of agreeableness*, which I described in §2.4. The latter are judgments about how nice something is for the person judging. Like aesthetic value judgments, Kant claims that judgments of agreeableness are based on subjective feelings, but they differ in that they make no claim to universal validity.<sup>221</sup> If I make a judgment of agreeableness about something I judge only that I find the thing agreeable; I do not judge whether it is worthy of anyone else's attention, approval or enjoyment.

Individualistic Aesthetic Relativism can perhaps be understood as the rejection of this distinction: as the view that aesthetic values are relative to individuals and that there is therefore no good reason to distinguish between judgments about what one likes and judgments about what is universally likeable. Aaron Meskin argues that whether such a view is true or false, those who believe it will be inclined to blur this distinction that Kant proposes.<sup>222</sup> In some cases this will result in Relativists passing off judgments of agreeableness as aesthetic value judgments, and in other cases it may involve an expectation that testimony about aesthetic values will merely be evidence of the speaker's personal preferences. In other words, widespread Relativist or Subjectivist views, enshrined in sayings such as 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' and '*de gustibus non est*

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<sup>221</sup> KANT 1951, p. 46 (§7).

<sup>222</sup> MESKIN, Aaron. Aesthetic Testimony: What Can We Learn from Others about Beauty and Art? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 69:1, 2004: 65-91; pp. 80-1.

*disputandum'*, may result in widespread Pessimism. Belief in such theories, rather than the truth of such theories, may be sufficient to explain our pessimistic tendencies.

The objectivist optimist can therefore explain intuitions favouring Pessimism by appealing to the fact that certain Anti-Objectivist views are widely held. But this raises the question of how to explain intuitions favouring those views. The claim that we are confused between aesthetic value judgments and judgments of agreeableness may be a question-begging explanation as it assumes that the distinction is appropriate, which in turn assumes the universal validity of aesthetic value judgments, which Anti-Objectivist views deny.

Meskin suggests that the source of belief in views such as Aesthetic Subjectivism and fine-grained versions of Aesthetic Relativism is the immediacy of aesthetic experience combined with the fact of aesthetic disagreement, both of which are causes of the popularity of such views without being good reasons to adopt them. The thought here is that, since aesthetic value judgments vary so wildly from person to person, and since they are based on the appearance of beauty as something immediately apparent in an object, it can seem as though aesthetic value judgments are nothing more than reports about how things seem to us.<sup>223</sup>

The immediacy of aesthetic experience derives from the subjective character of aesthetic experience, upon which aesthetic value judgments are based, as I explained in §2.3.2. I have already explained and defended an objectivist Response-Dependence for aesthetic values in art which accounts for this immediacy as the manifestation of objective aesthetic capacities. In chapter 5 I acknowledged that this Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism might imply Sensibility Relativism, but this means only that aesthetic values are anthropocentric,

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<sup>223</sup> MESKIN 2004, p. 88.

and only different relative to individuals insofar as human sensibilities differ in relevant ways in the circumstances ideal for aesthetic experience. The immediacy of aesthetic experience therefore does not speak against Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism or in favour of a more fine-grained Aesthetic Relativism.

The fact of disagreement is also not a good reason to adopt a fine-grained form of Aesthetic Relativism. A jury may disagree significantly over whether a defendant is guilty, but this does not imply that the guilt of the defendant is relative to different members of the jury. Nevertheless, it is common for people to confuse the epistemic with the metaphysical, and infer such Relativism from the fact of disagreement. Philosophers, of course, are not immune to such errors: Mackie defends his Error Theory with an argument from disagreement as well as his more compelling argument from queerness.<sup>224</sup> The problem is that disagreement is easily explained by one or more of the participants in the disagreement being mistaken, or subject to a cognitive shortcoming.

The immediacy of aesthetic experience and the fact of widespread aesthetic disagreement are, then, explanations of the widespread acceptance of Anti-Objectivist views without being good reasons to hold such views. Widespread belief in Anti-Objectivism is in turn a sufficient explanation for widespread belief in Pessimism, and so the intuitions favouring such views can be explained away by the Objectivist Optimist. But should they be? Perhaps Pessimism can be given a plausible defence.

### 7.3.4 Unusability Pessimism

I have alluded to folk and historical intuitions favouring Pessimism, but Hopkins provides a principled defence of Pessimism which deserves attention. Hopkins distinguishes between

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<sup>224</sup> MACKIE 1986, pp. 36-8.

*Unavailability Pessimism* and *Unusability Pessimism*.<sup>225</sup> The former is the standard pessimistic view that aesthetic testimony does not make aesthetic knowledge available. The latter is the more complicated view that, while aesthetic testimony does make aesthetic knowledge available, it is nevertheless irrational to form beliefs on the basis of this knowledge. Hopkins suggests that there is a non-epistemic norm prohibiting the use of testimony in forming aesthetic value judgments, even when such testimony provides excellent evidence of something's aesthetic values.<sup>226</sup> This is an attempt to defend the pessimistic intuitions I have described, but I will argue that it is a costly defence.

Hopkins considers the objection that it seems to be rational to see a film that is recommended by a friend.<sup>227</sup> If this is rational then it seems that it is rational to infer from aesthetic testimony that a film is worth seeing. Hopkins suggests that in such cases the norm against making use of the knowledge offered by aesthetic testimony lapses when the only alternatives are perverse.<sup>228</sup> Assuming that one is unable to sacrifice the time it would take to watch every film that is showing in order to determine which ones are worth seeing, the only alternative is to remain agnostic about the values of the films and pick one at random. This is perverse because the films are unlikely to be of equal value, and so Hopkins suggests that under the circumstances one can temporarily make use of aesthetic testimony.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> HOPKINS, Robert. How to be a Pessimist about Aesthetic Testimony. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 108:3, 2011: 138-157; p. 140.

<sup>226</sup> HOPKINS 2011, p. 144.

<sup>227</sup> HOPKINS 2011, p. 153.

<sup>228</sup> HOPKINS 2011, p. 154.

<sup>229</sup> HOPKINS 2011, p. 154.

Testimony is, after all, informative on the unusability pessimist account, it's just that there is a norm prohibiting the use of this information, but the norm lapses in this sort of emergency situation. Once one sees the film that is recommended, however, the norm kicks in once again, as it were, and one's evaluation of the film must be based only on one's own experience of it, not the testimony that was the rational basis for the decision to see it.

Hopkins claims, then, that when one experiences a film recommended by a friend, that friend's testimony should not play any role in one's evaluation of the film, even though the testimony was a good reason to see the film, apparently because it was a good reason to expect the film to be good. So the testimony justifies the expectation of aesthetic values in the work, but is trumped by one's first-hand experiences when one comes to judge what aesthetic values, if any, the work has. This might seem plausible, for reasons I will come to in §7.4, or it might seem rather odd that a somewhat reliable source of evidence of aesthetic value should be trumped by a more reliable source, rather than merely overshadowed or outweighed in one's deliberation by that more reliable source.

### 7.3.5 Evidential Optimism

Hopkins suggests that in the particular case he describes, intuitions favour his pessimistic explanation: aesthetic testimony is unusable at least in cases where one's own acquaintance with a work is available as a source of aesthetic knowledge. The Optimistic explanation, however, appears to be simple and effective: aesthetic testimony provides evidence of aesthetic values, so when a friend recommends a film this provides some evidence that the film is worth seeing, and therefore a defeasible reason to see it. Once one experiences the film first hand, one acquires further evidence of the film's aesthetic values, to be weighed up with the evidence gathered from testimony.

Most likely the testimony of a friend will, if it is not supported by one's own experience, be outweighed by the evidence from an acquaintance with the work. But here Hopkins is sceptical, because we can conceive of a case in which one's evaluations based on experience are inconclusive, such that evidence from testimony might be what decides whether one judges the film to be good or bad.<sup>230</sup> Suppose my friend says to me, 'I just saw *The King's Speech*. It's great, you should go and see it.' Suppose I then see the film and my experience by itself would lead me to judge the film to be of average quality: not particularly great, not too bad. If I were to make use of the two pieces of evidence I have gathered of the film's quality, from my own and my friend's experiences, I would reach the conclusion that *The King's Speech* is a good film, even though I did not particularly like it.

Hopkins understandably finds it counter-intuitive that this is a rational way to form an aesthetic value judgment.<sup>231</sup> However, the optimist need not be so optimistic as to say that one person's aesthetic testimony deserves as much credence as one's own aesthetic experiences. That, it seems, would be to adopt a transmission model of aesthetic testimony. But as Hopkins himself argues and as I explained in §7.2.1, the evidential model may be the more plausible way to conceive of aesthetic testimony, and evidence from first-hand experience in this as in other areas may be given a significantly greater weight than evidence from one other person's testimony.<sup>232</sup>

This Evidential Optimism might run into problems if the intuition Hopkins expresses remains for cases which are similar except that the testimony comes from more than one person or from expert critics. But such cases might involve for example a professional critic with good

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<sup>230</sup> HOPKINS 2011, pp. 154-5.

<sup>231</sup> HOPKINS 2011, pp. 154-5.

<sup>232</sup> HOPKINS 2000, p. 143.

credentials reviewing a work of art based on his first-hand experience of it, or a number of reliable critics who are acquainted with a work reaching a consensus about its aesthetic merits and defects. I am not so convinced that the pessimistic intuition—that in such cases such testimony should never be the deciding factor in one’s aesthetic verdict about a work—is a particularly strong or widespread intuition. Optimistic intuitions are also widespread, and I try to illustrate this further in §7.5. Before that, I will consider a much-discussed principle which Hopkins suggests as a possible candidate for the non-epistemic norm in his Unusability Pessimism.

#### 7.4 The Acquaintance Principle

*The Acquaintance Principle (AP)* states that one must be acquainted with a work of art in order to be in a position to pass judgment on its aesthetic values.<sup>233</sup> By being ‘acquainted with’ here I simply mean having experienced the work for oneself, for example having seen a film, having read a novel, and so on. AP seems to imply Pessimism about aesthetic testimony, which in turn can be used as premise 3 in the argument in §7.1 against Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism. Barring reasons other than AP for being a pessimist about aesthetic testimony, one way to defend Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism from the argument from Pessimism is to deny AP.

AP seems to account for some of the pessimistic intuitions I have described, and Hopkins proposes AP as a potential candidate for the non-epistemic norm that he believes prevents aesthetic testimony from being usable when we make aesthetic value judgments.<sup>234</sup> Budd interprets Pettit as defending AP and suggests that, at least for Pettit if not other advocates,

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<sup>233</sup> See, for example, BUDD, Malcolm. The acquaintance principle. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 43:4, 2003: 386-392.

<sup>234</sup> HOPKINS 2011, p. 150.

belief in AP is based on the assumption that aesthetic characterisations are perceptual: when we express aesthetic value judgments about something we make reference to what we perceive, suggesting that perceptual access to aesthetic values may be a necessary condition for aesthetic knowledge.<sup>235</sup>

Kant seems to endorse something like AP when, as I explained in §7.3.1, he claims that aesthetic value judgments may only be formed on the basis of one's own experience of the object in question. Kant's view and the endorsement of AP by others might be explainable by the fact that testimony cannot convey what it is like to experience a work of art. In the philosophy of mind, the case of Mary in the black and white room is a much discussed thought experiment relating to what it is like to experience colour, and to the subjective, phenomenal aspects of consciousness, or *qualia*, which are difficult to account for in a physicalist theory of the mind.<sup>236</sup> A version of this case may prove illustrative in the present discussion of aesthetic testimony.

In the original Mary case, Mary is born and raised in a black and white room in which she learns all of the physical facts about the colour red, but without ever seeing anything red. She then leaves the room and sees a red object for the first time. This seems to involve a phenomenal experience of red which is new to her and could not have been conveyed to her in the way that the physical facts were conveyed to her while she was living in the black and white room.<sup>237</sup> Perhaps when seeing red for the first time she learns something new, or perhaps not; perhaps she gains a kind of know-how as opposed to knowledge *that*, since,

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<sup>235</sup> BUDD 2003, pp. 388-9. He is describing PETTIT, Phillip. The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism, in SCHAPER, Eva (ed.) *Pleasure, Preference and Value: Studies in Philosophical Aesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 24-25.

<sup>236</sup> JACKSON 1986.

<sup>237</sup> JACKSON 1986.

according to the physicalist, all knowledge of the latter kind in relation to the colour red was given to her previously. This is subject to a lively debate which is of little relevance for present purposes, except that a parallel case involving aesthetic testimony suggests that pessimistic intuitions might be explained away.

#### 7.4.1 Aesthetic Mary

Consider Aesthetic Mary, who is born and raised in a cell in which she is deprived of experiencing works of art. She is able to learn everything that she can learn about art without experiencing it: what it consists in, what sorts of objects it involves, what sort of experiences it elicits in those who experience it, and what judgments are made about it and so on. She will know, for example, that Jimi Hendrix is widely regarded as one of the greatest electric guitar players there has been, that he made a certain number of studio records with the Jimi Hendrix Experience, featuring particular songs on particular subjects, that they marked a transition in popular music towards a 'heavier' sound. She can even read the lyrics of the songs and read scores transcribed from the recordings, and imagine how the music might have sounded. She can watch silent footage of Hendrix performing. But she cannot find out what it is actually like to hear Hendrix's works of art; her imagination cannot give her an auditory hallucination of a set of unique studio recordings, even if she can grasp certain melodies or rhythms from the information she does have.

Mary breaks out of her cell and heads to a music shop where she is able to listen to the Jimi Hendrix Experience albums and so she finds out what it is like to hear them. This could not have been conveyed to her while she was in her artistic-deprivation cell; one must hear the recordings to know what it is like to hear them, just as one must see a Rembrandt to know what it is like to see a Rembrandt, or navigate by echolocation in order to know what it is

like to navigate by echolocation. The Pessimist and the Optimist can agree on this: to know what it is like to experience something, one must have the experience or at least a very similar experience. One might empathise with another person but to the extent that this involves knowing what their experiences are like, it must involve feeling something that approximates what they feel to a high degree, and I am presupposing that it was ensured that Aesthetic Mary's experiences fell short of an adequate approximation of the aesthetic experiences she later had in the music shop.

What the Optimist and the Pessimist will not agree on is whether Aesthetic Mary could have deduced that the recordings were aesthetically valuable in various ways before she heard them. The Pessimist might be willing to grant that Aesthetic Mary would be inclined to form aesthetic value judgments on her limited information, but why should the Pessimist believe that these judgments could constitute knowledge?

The notion of the ideal aesthetic judge that I introduced in §3.2.2 is what I have in mind here: a full, comprehensive assessment of a work's aesthetic capacities might actually require a non-perspectival overview of the values of the aesthetic experiences that various different ideal aesthetic experiencers would have of a work. But that is not to diminish the importance of acquaintance in actually having the aesthetic experiences offered by a work, and in doing so using art exactly as it should be used. The ideal aesthetic *experiencer*, as the name suggests, experiences a work of art in an appropriate sort of way. The ideal aesthetic *judge* merely gathers information about a work's aesthetic capacities and forms a comprehensive judgment about the work's values, without necessarily appreciating those values in her own aesthetic experiences.

There is, uncontroversially, much that can be learned about a work without being acquainted with it, such as who made it and by what means, how it is regarded by others, and how it fits into art history. It is plausible, I will argue, that the gap in the puzzle, as it were, when one is not acquainted with a work but knows plenty about it, can sometimes be made up for by what one does have access to, so that one can accurately judge the work's aesthetic values. It is tempting to over-estimate, I think, the epistemic importance of acquaintance, because it is after all the point of art: Hendrix's recordings are not much use if one does not listen to them; learning about them may be interesting but it just cannot provide one with the sort of aesthetic enjoyment that listening can. But the importance of acquaintance in *enjoying* a work does not equate to the importance of acquaintance in *evaluating* a work, because enjoying guitar music and forming accurate judgments are two very different things, even when those judgments are about the enjoyability of guitar music.

Suppose that aesthetic values are objective. Aesthetic Mary would then be able to learn the facts about the aesthetic values of particular works of art without experiencing them; that is, AP would be false. When she does experience these works what changes is that she can actually reap whatever rewards those works offer in virtue of their aesthetic values: for example she can be moved emotionally by works that are expressive. This was not possible prior to her acquaintance with the works, and this might be enough to explain intuitions that favour a principle which states that one must experience a work in order to *know* its aesthetic values, even though the truth may be slightly different: one must experience a work in order to *appreciate* its aesthetic values. I am not presenting a question-begging defence of Aesthetic Objectivism and Optimism here, I am merely describing the Objectivist Optimist's take on the case of Aesthetic Mary in order to demonstrate that the position is coherent and remains on the table *despite intuitions that favour AP*, because it can explain

those intuitions. Having discussed Pessimism about aesthetic testimony, I will now discuss Optimism and defend a version of it.

## 7.5 Optimism about Aesthetic Testimony

I will now begin to argue that Optimism about aesthetic testimony is more explanatory than Pessimism. Although Pessimism can account for certain intuitions and observations, Optimism can account for those same intuitions and observations plus some things that Pessimism fails to explain. At the start of this chapter the challenge faced by my account of aesthetic values was that the account implied an implausible Optimism about aesthetic testimony. I will now attempt to demonstrate that Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism can explain away some of the intuitions about the implausibility of Optimism, while implying Optimism and thus accounting for our more optimistic intuitions. The Optimism defended is not implausibly strong and does not seem to pose a problem for the Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism that implies it.

We often rely on aesthetic testimony when forming beliefs about the aesthetic values of objects. I mentioned in §2.3 the example of critical reviews, which are widely used in making decisions about, for instance, what films to spend money on seeing. Reviews written by non-professional critics are now hugely popular on the internet, but reviews by purported experts still have an audience, for example in movie or music magazines and in newspapers.

Our reliance on reviews can, however, be explained away by Pessimism. Meskin explains that the information we take from reviews may be about what is likely to please people with particular aesthetic sensibilities, rather than about what is aesthetically valuable in a way

that is independent of such specialised sensibilities.<sup>238</sup> Readers of *Empire* movie magazine may tend to have a particular taste in films, such that they can rely on the rating *Empire* ascribes to a particular film as a good indication that they, the readers, are likely to enjoy that film. This is consistent with such readers being unable to learn, without seeing it, whether a film is actually good.

This pessimistic explanation may or may not be more successful than the optimistic view that reviews tell us about aesthetic values and not just what some people will like. Facts that might be harder for Pessimism to explain include the fact that we are willing to pay large amounts of money to travel great distances to see particular works of art which mere testimony has informed us are worth seeing. Keren Gorodeisky suggests that this is best explained by Optimism:

*...suspicion is too weak for motivating the sorts of efforts that we often make on nothing more than the word of another with regard to an object's aesthetic merit. For example, I might spend a lot of money on getting tickets to a concert, on the basis of the testimony of my musically informed and trustworthy friend, according to whom the concert is superb. And if we are deep lovers of art, we might also make flight reservations and go all the way to Berlin in order to see Alfred Menzel's paintings, about whose greatness we read in a book by the art historian Michael Fried. Would it be reasonable to make such efforts if what the testimony here gave us were mere unjustified suspicion? Aren't we motivated to go to the concert because we believe that it is great on the basis of testimony, perhaps rather like my mother might be*

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<sup>238</sup> MESKIN 2004, p. 72.

*motivated to get me a red desk lamp to match the colour of my desk on the basis of my testimony that my desk is red, even if she hasn't seen it?*<sup>239</sup>

Indeed, the sacrifices involved, of time, money, effort and so on, seem to undermine what the pessimist must say, which is that travelling across the world just to see an object for the first time is a gamble with or without relevant aesthetic testimony, and that it is perhaps therefore unwise that so many people are willing to do this on the basis of testimony. Such sacrifices must be a gamble according to Pessimism because testimony cannot tell us what is worth investing in experiencing. But given that we routinely engage in these investments, the explanation is plausibly that we do not believe we are taking such a gamble, because we do not believe in Pessimism.

But perhaps a similar explanation can be given as in the case of critical reviews: perhaps testimony about far-off works of art informs us about what is likely to please us, without informing us of what is aesthetically valuable. But in the previous case this ability to inform only needed to be reliable enough to justify parting with a few hours and a cinema ticket fare, and this made the hypothesis that reviews cater to particular, unrepresentative tastes easier to defend.

It is less plausible that testimony about far-off works of art is testimony about what only certain kinds of people will enjoy, as if this were more plausible it seems we would be more hesitant than we are to travel at great cost to see the so-called 'wonders of the world'. But the most reliable forms of aesthetic testimony might provide evidence of what one would enjoy in ideal circumstances; if a source of testimony can provide evidence of what would

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<sup>239</sup> GORODEISKY, Keren. A New Look at Kant's View of Aesthetic Testimony. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 50:1, 2010: 53-70; pp. 59-60.

please certain sensibilities, why not ideally refined sensibilities? On my account, evidence of a work's capacities to please in ideal circumstances is evidence of a work's aesthetic values.

If, as the Evidential Optimist says, aesthetic testimony provides evidence of the aesthetic values of works of art, it is less of a gamble to drag one's human sensibility across the globe to bring it in touch with what is calculated to please. Whereas if the testimony only tells us what is idiosyncratically enjoyable, the chance of having the wrong idiosyncrasies seems too high. I have not said enough yet to defend Optimism about aesthetic testimony, however.

### 7.5.1 Objectivist Optimism

It seems that Objectivism can account for the intuitions that lie behind the objection I presented in §7.1. But before I dismiss the intuitions favouring AP and consequently Pessimism, it will be necessary to provide a more positive defence of Optimism about aesthetic testimony. Although as I have explained there are also intuitions favouring Optimism, more needs to be said to tip the balance in its favour. Meskin's explaining away of pessimistic intuitions hints at the problems this defence of Optimism will face. Not only can belief in the subjectivity or subject-relativity of aesthetic values lead to belief in Pessimism about aesthetic testimony, but to some extent Pessimism may be justified due to the confusion that widespread belief in the subjectivity of values can generate.

Aesthetic testimony may fail to take place at all if the testifier draws no distinction between what is good and what they like, and so learning from aesthetic testimony will face the obstacle of identifying genuine aesthetic testimony. However, this does not lead to the pessimistic claim that we cannot find out the aesthetic values of a work from testimony alone. This merely renders learning from aesthetic testimony a difficult thing to do. This is something I will try to demonstrate in my defence of Optimism.

So although I think it is false that aesthetic values in art are entirely subjective or subject-relative, it is widely believed and this can explain why, rightly or wrongly, Pessimism about aesthetic testimony is also widely believed. Objectivist pessimists might be justified in their Pessimism given the undermining effects of popular Anti-Objectivist views. Alternatively, Objectivist Optimism might be justified if this and other confounding variables are controlled for in the gathering of aesthetic testimony. For example, one could listen only to testimony from people who do draw a distinction between what they like and what is good. I will now consider how strong evidence from aesthetic testimony could be, as this will determine whether it will be possible to learn about the aesthetic values of works of art from such evidence.

### 7.5.2 Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism and Optimism

If aesthetic values are capacities to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances, it should be possible to find out what aesthetic values a work has by hearing testimony from someone who has experienced the work in ideal circumstances, without having the work's aesthetic capacities manifest in one's own valuable aesthetic experiences. There are various obstacles to this indirect approach to ascertaining the aesthetic values of a work.

A major obstacle is the difficulty of attaining ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of a work of art. Ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience are something we can move towards with incremental rewards, like an athlete gradually building up strength, but only an ideal aesthetic experiencer can be guaranteed to have experiences which reflect the aesthetic capacities of a work.

Inasmuch as the sensibilities of ideal aesthetic experiencers vary, only the even less realistic ideal aesthetic judge can have the knowledge required to give a comprehensive picture of the valuable aesthetic experiences that a work is apt to produce for human beings in general. The ideal aesthetic judge is perhaps a hypothetical receiver of all available aesthetic testimony: he knows what values of aesthetic experience will arise for every instance of the heterogeneous human sensibility kind when it is put in ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of the work in question. If one can learn the aesthetic capacities of a work via testimony then this ideal epistemic point makes sense and, like the ideal circumstances for the aesthetic experience of a work, can perhaps be moved towards with incremental improvements in judgment. But it is beginning to look very difficult to learn from aesthetic testimony.

The dispositional nature of aesthetic values on my account is an asset in combining Optimism about aesthetic testimony with Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism. One can be aware that something has a disposition without experiencing the manifestation of that disposition: for example one does not need to smash a glass in order to know that it is fragile. One needs to know, perhaps, that glass is fragile, and that this object is made of glass. Or one could simply be told by a reliable source that if the glass is dropped on a hard surface it will most likely break. A reliable critic can give some evidence that a work of art is such that if it is experienced in ideal circumstances the resulting aesthetic experiences will have some degree or type of value. But an expert in the properties of glass is experienced or has gained her knowledge from more than just one person's experience on one occasion of glass breaking. Similarly, a single critic cannot give strong evidence that a work of art has some aesthetic value, because that critic is limited by his own sensibility even in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience.

One would need to get one's testimony from something like an ideal aesthetic judge, or be something close to an ideal aesthetic judge by gathering large amounts of controlled data regarding the aesthetic experiences had in response to a work, especially in conditions approaching the ideal for aesthetic experience. To reliably detect the aesthetic values of a work via testimony, it might be necessary to act as an aesthetic scientist and conduct controlled investigations, based on as much information as possible, into what the experiential capacities of particular objects are. There are many obstacles to success in ascertaining the objective aesthetic values of a work by this or any means, but this does not undermine the thesis that aesthetic values are objective capacities of works. Having said that, I will now confront further difficulties with finding out a work's aesthetic values and in doing so clarify the modest Optimism that I am defending and which can both explain pessimistic intuitions and defend Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism from the challenge they might seem to pose.

### 7.5.3 Modest Evidential Optimism

Hopkins and I agree that aesthetic testimony should be understood on the evidential model, as I described it in §7.2. One of the reasons Hopkins mentions is that the alternative model of transmission testimony might create situations in which one is warranted in believing both P and not-P, because aesthetic disagreement is so widespread that there will likely be reliable aesthetic testifiers who disagree.<sup>240</sup> If one critic transmits to me her warrant for believing that a work is very beautiful, and another critic transmits to me his warrant for believing that a work is very ugly, it seems I must form contradictory aesthetic judgments. I remain agnostic as to whether testimony ever takes place by transmission, so I will not

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<sup>240</sup> HOPKINS 2000, p. 231.

discuss this problem regarding transmission testimony. But unfortunately for the evidential model of aesthetic testimony, which I do endorse, it seems to face a similar problem.

Suppose that I ask one critic what she thinks of *The King's Speech*, and she says that it is a good film. I then, according to the evidential model, acquire evidence that it is a good film. This evidence could theoretically be balanced by the testimony of another critic who thinks that it is a bad film. With two conflicting testimonies, the epistemic probability of the film being good might be the same as it was before I acquired any evidence at all. I could stop at one critic, and then I would only be aware of evidence that the film is good. But the existence of a second critic who thinks the opposite might constitute a reason for me to refrain from assuming that the film is good. Although I am not aware of the second critic, I might be aware that it is possible that he exists and thinks that *The King's Speech* is a bad film. So in every case of evidential testimony it will be possible that the true balance of evidence available to be gathered from testimony is not accurately reflected in the limited sample of evidence that actually has been gathered from testimony.

But this is a problem already faced by scientists, who cannot be expected to gather all available evidence, and it is always possible that the next available piece of evidence could refute a theory. Nevertheless, it is usually thought that scientific enquiry affords some degree of epistemic objectivity, and that the mere possibility of conflicting evidence is not necessarily sufficient to undermine scientific conclusions.

Asking for film recommendations is a lot less rigorous than conducting an experiment, of course, so perhaps the evidence gathered from each instance of evidential testimony is not going to be very substantial. Even large samples of testimony about beauty are unlikely to be collected under controlled conditions, with confounding variables accounted for. The

possibility of critics who disagree does not render testimony completely uninformative, but it is never going to be very informative unless it is gathered in the way that scientific evidence is gathered: very briefly, this will involve controlling for confounding variables, collecting large samples of data, performing rigorous analysis and meta-analysis, and so on. I will now look at some examples of confounding variables in the evaluation of art, to demonstrate this need for a scientific approach if one is to get a reliable picture of a work's aesthetic values without experiencing it.

#### 7.5.4 Confounding Variables

More would need to be known about what would count as a confounding variable in order for aesthetic testimony to be a good source of aesthetic knowledge. For example, snobbery seems to be widespread and may render many of our aesthetic judgments unreliable. Matthew Kieran defines snobbery as the corruption of the aesthetic response by irrelevant (usually social) considerations.<sup>241</sup> He draws on evidence from Frédéric Brochet that we fail to notice the similarity of taste between a white wine and the same white wine dyed red.<sup>242</sup> Brochet also finds that wine is described as being of better quality if it is decanted into an expensive-looking bottle.<sup>243</sup>

Kieran also mentions James Cutting who has found that we tend to prefer visual art that we are more familiar with; it seems that mere exposure to a work of art can lead us to rate it

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<sup>241</sup> KIERAN, Matthew. The Vice of Snobbery: Aesthetic Knowledge, Justification and Virtue in Art Appreciation. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 60:239, 2010: 243-263.

<sup>242</sup> BROCHET, Frédéric. Chemical object representation in the field of consciousness. *Application presented for the grand prix of the Académie Amorim following work carried out towards a doctorate from the Faculty of Oenology, General Oenology Laboratory* 351, 2001.

<sup>243</sup> BROCHET 2001.

highly, and this would suggest that mere exposure might also act as a confounding variable in the gathering of reliable evidential testimony.<sup>244</sup>

Kieran, Meskin, Margaret Moore and Mark Phelan have recently provided a counter-study to Cutting which suggests that the mere exposure effect works positively for good works and negatively for bad ones: that is, exposure to good art tends to lead one increasingly to judge it to be good, whereas exposure to bad art tends to lead one to increasingly judge it to be bad.<sup>245</sup> This methodology presupposes that there are objectively good and bad works of art, but in doing so it provides evidence of a distinction between works of art which we like more the more we see them, and those which we like less the more we see them, and this distinction may be best explained by the presupposition being correct. The study is also good news for Optimism about evidential aesthetic testimony, because rather than being a confounding variable, exposure may improve the reliability of our aesthetic judgments and therefore their strength as indications of aesthetic value.

Whether mere exposure or widespread snobbery in particular can make aesthetic testimony unreliable is not important for current purposes; my point is that there are variables which would need to be ruled out as explanations of aesthetic responses, if aesthetic testimony is to be gathered in a way that produces reliable evidence of aesthetic value. But it is unclear what would prevent this from being a means of finding out an object's aesthetic values without experiencing it, apart from the same challenges that scientists face in answering questions that require the controlled and systematic gathering and analysis of large quantities of data.

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<sup>244</sup> CUTTING, J.E. The Mere Exposure Effect and Aesthetic Preference. In LOCHER, P. *et al.* (eds.), *New Directions in Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts*, New York: Baywood, 2006, pp. 33-46.

<sup>245</sup> MESKIN, Aaron, et al. Mere exposure to bad art. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 54:2, 2013: 1-26.

This is no defence of evidential testimony as a *good* way of finding out about an object's aesthetic values—quite the opposite—but the mere *possibility* of learning from aesthetic testimony, however difficult that might be, is sufficient to block the argument presented in §7.1. I will now consider a further challenge to this modestly optimistic position.

### 7.5.5 Qualified Optimism

Even with a scientific approach in which variables such as snobbery are ruled out as explanations of the data, it might turn out to be impossible to achieve a necessary independence between subjects, without jeopardising the cultural knowledge which might be required for the proper aesthetic appreciation of art. It seems that as long as evidential aesthetic testimony is possible, no matter how weak it is it should be possible to gather enough testimony to provide strong evidence for an aesthetic value judgment. However, there may be a problem of testimonial evidence levelling off at a certain threshold due to diminishing returns. This might happen if the testifiers are not independent.

Suppose two twins nearly always answer questions in the same way, rightly or wrongly. Twin 1's testimony gives us some evidence that X, but twin 2's similar testimony does not double the evidence gathered because the twins are not independent judges. This is perhaps implied about miracles in Hume's writing on the subject. He says that miracles are so improbable that we can never amass enough evidence to justify believing in them.<sup>246</sup> Either Hume must say that the evidence against miracles is infinite, or he must say that the evidence from testimony levels-off below a certain threshold.

It seems that non-independent observers might not each provide us with an equal amount of evidence for what they are testifying to. Religious communities might work in a similar

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<sup>246</sup> HUME, David. *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Broadview Press, 2011: section 10.

way to the twins that I have described, rendering testimony about miracles to be inadequate as Hume describes. Perhaps the second piece of testimony provides less evidence than the first, and this trend may continue so that the level of justification for the aesthetic value judgment stays below a certain threshold. This might prevent evidential testimony from providing us with knowledge or justification in some cases.

This may be a problem for aesthetic testimony if aesthetic value judgments require cultural knowledge and if cultural knowledge prevents us from being independent. Reliable aesthetic judgment seems often to require cultural knowledge, for example to appreciate some works of Haitian visual art it is necessary to have some knowledge of the beliefs and concepts involved in Vodou theology. But sufficient knowledge of a culture may cause cultural bias leading to diminishing returns from gathering aesthetic testimony. Perhaps when different subjects acquire cultural knowledge of this kind they become more similar and less independent, rather like the religious communities who, perhaps due to their shared cultural heritage, may be insufficiently independent for their testimony to ever add up to a good case for the occurrence of miracles.

This worry about evidence levelling-off is perhaps nothing more than pessimistic speculation, but it may be necessary to investigate the role of cultural knowledge in aesthetic appreciation, in relation to independence and its importance for the reliability of testimony, before we can confidently conclude that evidential aesthetic testimony can justify the forming or changing of one's aesthetic judgments. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate, in order to defend Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism, one need only be an optimist about aesthetic testimony to the extent that one rejects premise 3 in the argument I presented in §7.1 (or in other words, one rejects AP). There may be serious practical

obstacles to learning from aesthetic testimony, but this would only imply that it would be far easier to find out a work's aesthetic values by experiencing it, and not that one could *only* find out a work's aesthetic values by experiencing it.

A work being aesthetically valuable is nowhere near as unlikely as the occurrence of a miracle, so it is not clear that the same epistemic problems apply when gathering aesthetic testimony. It seems that in principle one could find out the aesthetic values of a work of art without experiencing it, but this may be an extremely difficult task, and so although AP is false, pessimistic intuitions are understandable.

One might argue that Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism implies a stronger Optimism than the one I have defended. But it seems that claiming that aesthetic values are objective capacities of art works does not commit me to the notion that we could learn about aesthetic values as easily as we can learn the location of a hotel, for instance. Aesthetic capacities are inferred from their manifestation in ideal aesthetic experiences, and this speaks against a strong form of Optimism. One would need to know that someone was in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience when they had the experience that is the basis of their aesthetic testimony, in order to know that the testimony is evidence of aesthetic values in the work rather than of some irrelevant subjective influence. It seems that Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism does not imply an implausibly strong form of Optimism.

## 7.6 Conclusions

The Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism that I have defended in this dissertation seems not to be vulnerable to a challenge from aesthetic testimony. The challenge is based on the assumption that the objectivity of aesthetic values implies that we should be able to learn about the aesthetic values of works of art via testimony, which allegedly we cannot.

Pessimism about aesthetic testimony is based on the idea that one must directly experience something in order to know its aesthetic values, which in turn is based on confusions involving widespread Anti-Objectivist assumptions and a conflation of how valuable something is with what it is like to appreciate it. The apparent reasons for Pessimism can be accounted for by Optimism, as can our more optimistic intuitions which Pessimism struggles to explain. Aesthetic testimony seems to provide some evidence of the aesthetic values of objects, and although this evidence might be very weak or difficult to accumulate, the Aesthetic Objectivism I defend does not imply otherwise and remains unscathed by these observations about aesthetic testimony. Aesthetic testimony is testimony about the capacities for works of art to produce certain responses, and is much like testimony about cause and effect more generally. In the next and final chapter I draw conclusions from and summarise the dissertation thus far, concluding that the aesthetic values of art are ontologically objective capacities to produce non-aesthetically valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances.

## 8. Conclusions

### 8.0 Introduction

In this final chapter I draw concluding remarks from the previous chapters and summarise the claims that I have been defending. I begin by revisiting the paradox of taste and explaining how I have attempted to answer it. I then summarise the account of aesthetic values in art that I have defended, including the claim that non-aesthetic values of aesthetic experiences are primary in the constitution of the aesthetic values of art works. I clarify that aesthetic values on this account are objective capacities possessed by works, and they are anthropocentric values in that they depend on human sensibilities, which may vary even in ideal circumstances. I then return to Hume's ideal observer theory and summarise my own account of ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience and judgment. Finally, I recap my responses to objections favouring rival meta-aesthetical positions, and summarise Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism.

### 8.1 The Paradox of Taste Revisited

As I explained in §2.3, we have conflicting intuitions about the objectivity or subjectivity of aesthetic values in art. It seems that some works are much better than others, but it also seems that beauty is in the eye of the beholder in the sense that our responses to works of art which are the basis for our evaluations of them are subjective, sometimes emotional, and apparently quite personal. Insofar as it is a 'matter of taste' whether work A is better than work B, in the sense that one's judgments about this are not epistemically constrained by a judgment-independent reality and one cannot therefore be in error, it seems that it is never universally or objectively true that work A is better than work B. On the other hand,

supposing that works can be objectively better or worse, it would seem that the aesthetic values of art works must not be a matter of subjective taste. Which is it, then: are the aesthetic values of art, or are they not, a matter of taste about which there is no disputing?

It can seem that we can be mistaken about whether something is beautiful or otherwise aesthetically valuable or disvaluable, that some aesthetic disagreements are reasonable, and that some works of art are far better than others regardless of what we think. On my account this is indeed the case: the aesthetic values of art are not merely a matter of taste about which there is no disputing. The possibility of error in aesthetic judgment is due to the cognitive command exerted by that which is ontologically objective (§1.4). When judgments diverge over an objective matter of fact, this is due to cognitive shortcomings on the part of at least one judge, and patterns of convergence in judgment are best explained by the tracking of ontologically objective states of affairs (§§1.4.1-2).

One might argue that patterns of convergence in aesthetic judgment would be better explained by similarities in psychology, without the need to posit objective entities to explain convergence. But ontological objectivity can explain similarities in psychology, and it seems to be the right explanation: we have adapted to be sensitive in some ways to the ontologically objective environment so that we may survive to reproduce, and so similarities of psychology are to some extent similarities in sensitivity to that which is ontologically objective.

Our sensitivity to that which is ontologically objective can be more or less refined, and we can misattribute aesthetic values by basing aesthetic value judgments on aesthetic experiences that take place outside ideal circumstances. Errors in aesthetic judgment are therefore possible, in fact most likely widespread since ideal circumstances are not easy to

obtain, and so it is often reasonable for us to disagree about the values of art works and debate those values, as critics do in practice. Recall, as I explained in chapter 3, that ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience include whatever will allow one to understand the work in question and appreciate masterpieces in general. This will involve exercising the abilities that comprise epistemic objectivity, and possibly other characteristics such as emotional responsiveness and reflective capacities. Errors of aesthetic judgment are likely to occur often since it would not take much to fall short of the ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience and therefore respond to a work in ways that are not indicative of its aesthetic capacities. I will now summarise in further detail my proposed answer to the paradox of taste, or rather the explanation of our conflicting intuitions in Meta-Aesthetics that I have been defending.

## 8.2 Aesthetic Values in Art

To account for our conflicting intuitions about the objectivity of aesthetic values in art I have offered the following account. A work  $W$  has aesthetic value  $V$  if and only if there could be a human critic in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of  $W$  who would experience  $W$  as having  $V$ , and the critic would experience  $W$  as having  $V$  because  $W$  has  $V$ . For example, a piece of music may be elegant if and only if in the ideal circumstances suited to the aesthetic experience of the music, one might experience the music as elegant. The elegance of the music will be what causes one in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience to experience the music as elegant. One who judges the music to be entirely lacking in elegance will be straightforwardly mistaken given that its elegance is there to be experienced by a critic in ideal circumstances.

Aesthetic values such as elegance, then, are objective features of works of art. And yet, we evaluate art on the basis of our subjective states: aesthetic value judgments are based on the way art works and particular features of them make us respond (§2.4.1). Our responses to art can involve thoughts and imaginings engaged in a complex interaction, which is aesthetic experience. On occasion such experiences are complex in a particular way involving indirect pleasure, for example taken in appreciating something's capacity to make one feel sad (§4.4.5). Insofar as they are pleasurable, subjective experiences of an aesthetic sort can be valuable experiences. Works of art can have ontologically objective dispositional properties which in ideal circumstances cause one who experiences their manifestation to have valuable aesthetic experiences. Such properties are the work's aesthetic values (§3.5).

The elegance of a piece of music, then, is the work's capacity, in virtue of its natural properties, to give an ideal aesthetic experiencer valuable aesthetic experiences as of elegance in the music. Elegance is an example of a thick value predicate, as although it is partly evaluative it is also partly descriptive and not just any valuable work could fall under its description (§2.2.1). Natural properties of a work, for example the structure of a piece of music, make the work describable in certain ways, and if it falls under the descriptive component of 'elegant' a work may also be evaluable as elegant.

When a work does fall under such thick aesthetic concepts a work may in virtue of this fall under the thin aesthetic value predicate of 'ugly' or 'beautiful', so for example a beautiful piece of music may be beautiful partly because it is elegant, and elegant because of certain natural properties that it possesses (§2.2.1). But these properties must be something that we can, in ideal circumstances, experience aesthetically in a manner which is valuable. The ultimate source of aesthetic value in art is our propensity to enjoy it, so to that extent it is

right that we have the impression that aesthetic values are subjective, as I will now reiterate.

### 8.2.1 The Value of Aesthetic Experience

Experiencing an art work *W* as having aesthetic value *V* involves having an aesthetic experience *E* which is itself valuable in virtue of being pleasurable in a complex manner involving the imagination and the understanding (§4.3.1). Although an ideal aesthetic experiencer would have experience *E* because *W* has *V*, *W* only has *V* because *E* is itself valuable. The distinctiveness of aesthetic experience is the interaction of belief and imagination, and this can involve a sense of playful exploration or quasi-learning. The content of one's imaginative and cognitive experience of an art work can be a source of pleasure of this distinctive aesthetic kind, and insofar as the work has the capacity to produce such pleasure in ideal circumstances, the work will be aesthetically valuable.

For example, the content of one's experience of pure music may involve the imagination of sadness in the music due to certain antecedently valueless properties such as tones or rhythms. One may take pleasure in this cognitive-imaginative experience of music which involves the imagination of sadness which the music does not literally possess, but which is based on cognition of the work's features and the resultant effects on one's aesthetic sensibility, producing a valuable aesthetic experience as of sad music. The music will be expressive of sadness and aesthetically valuable in virtue of this because in ideal circumstances human critics will experience the music in this way.

The value of aesthetic experiences is probably not aesthetic value, given that aesthetic value is an instrumental value to provide valuable aesthetic experiences (§4.4). To avoid a regress of aesthetically valuable aesthetic experiences, it seems there must be *non-aesthetically*

valuable aesthetic experiences in virtue of which works apt to produce them are themselves *aesthetically* valuable in an instrumental sense.

The pleasure taken in aesthetic experience can supply its non-aesthetic value if we conceive of aesthetic pleasure just as ordinary pleasure taken in a distinctive kind of experience involving the interplay of the imagination and the understanding. The value of such experiences is hedonic and perhaps ultimately moral: aesthetic pleasure may be a morally good-making feature of the act of engaging with a work of art. Aesthetic values in art are instrumental values to supply aesthetic enjoyment. Valuable aesthetic experiences involve taking pleasure in the aesthetic, but the value of this need not be, and perhaps should not be, construed as aesthetic value. Positive aesthetic value is, then, the capacity to produce experiences which have two features: they are aesthetic; and they are pleasurable. Negative aesthetic value is the capacity to produce unpleasant aesthetic experiences. I will now further summarise the element of Aesthetic Value Empiricism in my account.

### 8.2.2 Aesthetic Value Empiricism

The dependence of the aesthetic values of a work on the values of aesthetic experiences does not imply that just anything could produce the experience in virtue of which a work has a certain aesthetic value (§4.2). Works are valuable because of how they can be experienced, but not just anything could supply the same experience as could a work, because one of the identity conditions for an experience is that it is an experience of the particular thing that it is an experience of. Aesthetic experiences are externalist: the object of an aesthetic experience is part of the experience, so that an indistinguishable experience of something else could not bestow that thing with the aesthetic values of the former object (§4.2.1).

But this does not mean that the ultimate source of an object's aesthetic values is the object itself, because were it not for the imaginative content of aesthetic experiences of the object, which insofar as they are imaginative depart from the mere veridical apprehension of the object, the object's properties would not constitute aesthetic values. It is therefore unnecessary to regard works of art as primary in the constitution of their own aesthetic values in order to avoid the conclusion that anything which produces an experience with a certain character is an aesthetically valuable object, because there is more to an aesthetic experience than its character.

Aesthetic values are constituted by properties of works of art that dispose the work to provide valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. A work's capacity to produce such experiences bears a relation to the aesthetic sensibilities of human beings, in their refined state in ideal circumstances, but the capacity also supervenes on natural properties of the work which are its objective aesthetic values. The value of the ideal aesthetic experience is the degree to which it is pleasurable in virtue of its involvement of a harmonious interplay between thoughts and imaginings.

Aesthetic object values depend on aesthetic experience values: for example, we can only make sense of a vase's elegance in terms of its aptness to be experienced pleasantly. One might argue that the elegance of a vase is entirely due to response-independent features such as shape, but this seems to overlook the evaluative aspect of a thick concept such as 'elegance'. 'Elegant' does more than describe features such as shape; it positively evaluates an object according to such features, and it is unclear how one could do this without reference to the positive value of experiencing such features.

In Ethics one might rationally condemn an act that has never occurred, and therefore that nobody has experienced, by applying moral principles. But it seems that in Aesthetics there are no principles that one could refer to as the basis for an evaluative judgment, other than, perhaps, the principle that art is to be experienced. Aesthetic experiences must figure in the rational assessment of a work's aesthetic values, whereas this need not occur in the rational assessment of an action's moral values, and this is plausibly explained by Aesthetic Value Empiricism. I will now clarify that, on the account that I am summarising, the aesthetic values of art are capacities possessed by works of art.

### 8.2.3 Aesthetic Capacities

We sometimes respond with aesthetic experiences to works of art when we engage with them in ordinary ways, such as by listening to music or reading a novel. These experiences are aesthetic because of the way they involve the imagination and the understanding in a manner that can be a source of pleasure. One can be more or less engaged with a work's capacity to exercise the imagination and the understanding in this way. Being more or less engaged with this amounts to moving towards or away from the ideal circumstances for the manifestation of these capacities in one's aesthetic experiences.

The aesthetic values of works of art manifest themselves, in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience, in one's valuable aesthetic experiences of those works. This manifestation is unlocked by the manifestation of one's dispositions to respond with valuable aesthetic experiences to the features of works. The joint manifestation of the properties of works of art and the properties of human sensibilities can result in aesthetic experiences which are more or less worth having, and this is the measure of an art work's aesthetic values.

The dispositions of a critic in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience to appreciate a work are not determinate of the work's values, but determinate of the concepts which fall upon those values, so for example an elegant vase is elegant because of properties such as shape, but the concept of elegance applies to a vase with such properties because of how human beings in ideal circumstances are disposed to respond to a vase with such properties (§3.4).

The above account of aesthetic values involves Response-Dependence: the view that aesthetic value concepts are shaped by our dispositions to respond to works of art, so that a work is aesthetically valuable if and only if in ideal circumstances one would respond to its properties in particular ways. Response-Dependence is related to Relativism as it involves Anthropocentrism, which may be defined as relativity to the reference class of humans in general (§5.2.1).

Anthropocentrism implies that faultless disagreements about the aesthetic values of art would be possible between human critics and members of a Martian species capable of aesthetic appreciation but with different sensibilities to Humans. But if aesthetic values in art are relative to sensibilities, then to the extent that individual human beings are different to one another with respect to their aesthetic sensibilities, it seems that faultless disagreements might occur among Human critics (§5.3.2). The constraint of ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience may reduce the extent to which faultless disagreements can occur, as presumably under the same epistemic circumstances we can expect more convergence than otherwise. I will now further summarise the stance I have taken on the possibility of faultless disagreement.

### 8.2.4 Faultless Disagreement

The ideal circumstances for aesthetic *judgment* would allow one to judge a work on the basis of the aesthetic experiences it is apt to produce for ideal experiencers of all stripes (§3.2.2). The theoretical ideal judge would have the full picture of a work's aesthetic values, and so although in a way aesthetic values are relative to different instances of human sensibility, one might say they are not so much relative but pluralistic: a work may be apt to produce a variety of aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience, and the values of all of those experiences will reflect the work's objective aesthetic values, even though an individual ideal aesthetic experiencer may or may not have access to the full range of experiences available.

Insofar as human aesthetic sensibilities differ in ideal circumstances, aesthetic values may be relative in a fine-grained way. But we are probably too similar for aesthetic values to be subject-relative. Cultural disagreement might speak in favour of Cultural Relativism, but on my account the disagreements can be explained, even as faultless if indeed they are, if Constructivism is plausible: that is, if different cultures by interpreting a work differently can essentially construct a work which may have distinct aesthetic values to those of the work as interpreted by other cultures, because these separate interpretations produce distinct works of art (§5.4.1). On the other hand, interest in the aesthetic is cross-cultural and it is plausible that a work appealing to some cultures and not others is best explained by cultural misunderstandings, overestimations or underestimations of aesthetic value (§§5.4.2-3).

The sorts of apparent faultless disagreements that might occur among ideal aesthetic experiencers would not be in violation of the cognitive command constraint (§1.4), because if one judges a work's aesthetic values just on the basis of one's own aesthetic experience of

it, one falls short of appreciating the different aesthetic experiences made possible by individual differences among ideal aesthetic experiencers, or by repeated acquaintances with the work. The cognitive shortcoming one would be subject to would be the inevitable falling short of the requirements for ideal aesthetic *judgment*, which would require one to forgo one's perspectival appreciation of a work and to consider a work's aesthetic capacities relative to human ideal aesthetic experiencers of all stripes.

Inevitably falling short of the ideal circumstances for aesthetic judgment and instead judging a work in the ideal circumstances for aesthetic *experience*, and judging it differently to other ideal aesthetic experiencers, could be construed as a faultless disagreement, but perhaps it is not disagreement at all. I will now elaborate on this summary of my Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism with reference to its primary source material which is Hume's standard of taste.

### 8.3 Humean Response-Dependence

Hume's standard of taste is broadly correct: a work is valuable insofar as an ideal aesthetic experiencer would find it to be so (§3.1). The ideal experiencer is in a state of epistemic objectivity and understands the work in question. Their human sensibility disposes them to respond with aesthetic pleasure to that which has the capacity to produce it. Their sensibility is refined so as to allow them to appreciate that which meets independent standards including the test of time (§3.3.1). Passing such tests is best explained by objective values, and one who is good at detecting values in works that pass the tests will be good at detecting them elsewhere as well.

Hume's ideal observer theory of beauty in art can be construed as a Response-Dependence theory because it identifies beauty as that which is possessed by a work if and only if an ideal critic in ideal conditions would respond in the right way to the work. The concept

'beauty' is therefore, according to Hume, shaped by the dispositions of the ideal critic to respond to works of art. On my account, this and other aesthetic value concepts are shaped by human dispositions to respond in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience. They are shaped so as to pick out certain ontologically objective features of works in virtue of which those works are capable of producing valuable aesthetic experiences in such circumstances.

Ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience are the circumstances that will allow a human observer to enjoy works that by other measures may be identified as masterpieces. The convergence of judgments by disparate individuals, cultures and eras regarding masterpieces of art is best explained by the potency of such works as providers of worthwhile human experiences of an aesthetic sort. This indication is independent to that of ideal aesthetic experiences, which themselves will succeed as indications of aesthetic values in art if ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience are those in which one would appreciate masterpieces.

One might argue that consensus over masterpieces can be explained otherwise than by objective aesthetic excellence. This might involve convergence of judgment not in the service of knowledge but in the service of conformity, perhaps for social reasons. But it is not clear why we would make the choices we do in promoting particular works as those over which we should converge in our aesthetic judgments. And if we chose works lacking in objective excellence to form a consensus as if they were excellent, it seems there would be more resistance to such conformity than we actually see with works about which there is a consensus that they are masterpieces.

The excellence of an artistic masterpiece, and the aesthetic values that make a masterpiece which may be found to a lesser extent in lesser works of art, are capacities possessed by the

art objects to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances. Ideal circumstances involve sufficient epistemic objectivity to allow one to detect the features of masterpieces which explain their universal approbation, and to detect such features in other works, whether works that are not as good as masterpieces, or masterpieces which for whatever reason are not universally praised. One only detects those features that are manifest in one's experience, and to the extent that individual differences of sensibility are compatible with ideal circumstances, one person's ideal aesthetic experiences may differ in value from another's.

Only in the ideal epistemic conditions for aesthetic *judgment*, which involve an awareness of the values of all of these sensibility-variant aesthetic experiences, would a critic be guaranteed to comprehensively judge the aesthetic values of a work of art. To enjoy art one must get swept away, as it were, whereas to judge its capacities for worthwhile experience in oneself *and* others (where those capacities vary for different individuals in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience), one must step back and dispassionately examine the information of how disparate human sensibilities would respond in ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience. I will now further recap this distinction between ideal aesthetic experience and ideal aesthetic judgment.

### 8.3.1 Ideal Critics in Ideal Conditions

Ideal circumstances for aesthetic *experience* are circumstances in which all available pertinent information is known, and so ideal conditions for the aesthetic experience of a work of art are those conditions in which the work is fully understood. Ideal conditions for aesthetic *judgment* of a work of art, on the other hand, are those conditions in which the values of all ideal aesthetic experiences are known about. To reap the rewards of aesthetic

experiences of a good work of art one should aspire towards ideal conditions for aesthetic experience. But to have a comprehensive overview of a work's aesthetic values, obtaining ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience might be neither necessary nor sufficient, since a work's aesthetic values correspond not just to the values of the aesthetic experiences oneself would have in ideal circumstances, but to the values of all of the aesthetic experiences offered by the work to ideal aesthetic experiencers with all the varieties of sensibility that the human race includes.

Ideal circumstances may vary for different works, and an ideal aesthetic experiencer may only be ideal relative to a particular work, style or medium. For example, a scholar of Shakespeare might not be qualified to reliably detect the aesthetic values of abstract sculptures, and it might even be the case that in order to reliably detect the values of one kind of art work it is necessary to forgo the skills needed to reliably detect the values of the other. Furthermore, it is clear that whereas, for example, a Horror film might be best appreciated with the lights switched off, a different sort of work will be best appreciated in different lighting conditions, and so ideal external circumstances can vary for particular works.

For these reasons it is not sensible to provide a specific list of ideal circumstances. Hume's attempt to identify the characteristics of the ideal critic seems to be a somewhat successful attempt to characterise epistemic objectivity in relation to art objects, but not much more should be said about the ideal aesthetic experiencer than that she has an objective awareness of whatever the art object is and has the capacity to appreciate works that by other measures are excellent.

Plug a person with ideal epistemic objectivity into the ideal circumstances for the experience of a particular work, and the values of the aesthetic experiences she undergoes as a result will be indicative of the work's aesthetic values relative to her sensibility. Plug a person with ideal epistemic objectivity into the ideal circumstances for aesthetic judgment, if that is possible, and her aesthetic value judgments will reflect all the aesthetic values of a work, relative to all human sensibilities.

For purposes of making a comprehensive aesthetic value judgment one must do the best one can to approximate the ideal circumstances for aesthetic judgment, and this could involve employing the scientific method in gathering the aesthetic testimony of ideal (or close to ideal) aesthetic experiencers (§7.5.5). The project would be difficult, however, given all the opportunities for error. More importantly, to get out of art what is offered to us, we should pursue the easier and more worthwhile task of honing our appreciative abilities and ideal experiential faculties, so that we can gain increasing access to the valuable experiences that a work can provide one who appraises it in the ideal circumstances for aesthetic experience. Given that ideal circumstances are defined in relation to certain identifiable masterpieces, it is likely that they will give one access to some of the greatest aesthetic pleasures available from art. I will now recap the responses I made in the previous few chapters to some of the main objections to Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism.

## 8.4 Anti-Objectivism

Ontological objectivity seems to involve existence independent of our awareness, making certain propositions true independently of whether they are believed, such that we can be mistaken about that which is ontologically objective (§1.1). Something might fail to be ontologically objective, or lack this objectivity to a significant degree, if: its existence

depends on our awareness of it, or beliefs about it are true if and only if they are believed (Subjectivism); or if it makes no propositions true at all, whether because they are all false (Error Theory) or because no propositions describe it (Non-Cognitivism). Barring those possibilities, the degree to which something is ontologically objective might depend on to what extent different beliefs about it are faultless, due to the relativity of truth to a reference class which may be more or less fine-grained (§5.1).

It can seem that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, such that for example it can seem that we cannot learn that something is beautiful without beholding it (§7.1-4). Indeed, beauty and other aesthetic values are in the eye of the beholder in the sense that what shapes aesthetic value concepts including beauty is our capacity to behold properties of works of art in a more or less enjoyable manner. But this does not make it impossible to learn that something is beautiful without beholding it.

Testimony about a work's aesthetic values can in principle justify the formation or alteration of an aesthetic value judgment. Such aesthetic learning takes place according to the evidential model of testimony, as the experiential nature of aesthetic values in art implies that the discovery of such values is an empirical matter: normally one finds out that a work is aesthetically valuable by experiencing the manifestation of its aesthetic capacities, and one's experience of a work can serve as evidence of what experience capacities the work has. Aesthetic Value Empiricism, however, might also seem to suggest that to become aware of a work's values one must be acquainted with the work so that one can be acquainted with the manifestation of its experience capacities. But one need not have the capacities manifest in one's own experience in order to be made aware of them, for one can be aware that others experience a work in a certain way.

Scepticism about the ontological objectivity of values can take the form of an Error Theory, according to which value judgments all turn out false because they inevitably describe the world as being a way that it is not, or as containing things called 'values' which do not really exist (§6.1). In Ethics Mackie identified the objective prescriptivity of values as a queer property that we cannot accommodate in a naturalistic ontology.

Aesthetic values, however, do not prescribe behaviours (§6.1.1). On my account it seems not so much that works of art dictate that we enjoy them, but rather they are disposed to cause us to enjoy them, and this is largely a fact about the work itself and what properties it instantiates, more so than about human beings spreading their minds onto the world. I will now recap the stance I have taken on the question of whether aesthetic judgments are descriptive and also whether their involvement of emotions means that we ought to move further in the direction of Aesthetic Subjectivism.

#### 8.4.1 Non-Cognitivism and Subjectivism

A work has some aesthetic value *V* if and only if our dispositions to respond to the work are such that the concept '*V*' falls upon the work. This does not entail that the work is only *V* because we think so, or that if we were unaware of the work's being *V* it would not be *V*, because the work's *V*-ness is constituted by dispositions on the part of the work which bear relations to human sensibilities, not by instances of aesthetic judgment or experience (§3.4.1). Even though the aesthetic values of art are picked out by concepts which are shaped by human dispositions to respond, the values themselves have a degree of ontological objectivity because they are dispositions that a work has mind-independently, and we can and do make errors in the application of aesthetic concepts in attempting to pick out a work's aesthetic dispositions.

Aesthetic value judgments are based on subjective feelings but imply universal validity. The judgments can function like judgments made in Ethics or the sciences, but unlike judgments in the sciences there is something about value judgments that seems to permit basing them on how the subject matter makes one feel. One might therefore be sceptical that aesthetic value judgments describe works of art at all (§6.2).

One can argue that aesthetic value judgments are not attempts to describe aesthetic capacities, but this is consistent with aesthetic values being such capacities, or with it being felicitous to revise the concept of aesthetic value so that it describes such capacities, since they seem to be the only distinctively 'aesthetic' values in art (§§6.2.1-4). Aesthetic value judgments may be non-cognitive expressions which do not describe works of art as being one way or another. But this is consistent with their being one way or another, and with their being more or less capable of producing valuable aesthetic experiences.

One might argue that evaluation is an emotional process, suggesting that aesthetic values are determined by or relative to our emotions, but there is little reason to adopt such a view (§6.2.5). The relevance of emotion to aesthetic evaluation seems to be that the value of works of art can be due to their capacity to produce emotional responses, but such capacities can be dispassionately discerned, and would have to be if one were to guarantee a comprehensive overview of a work's capacities relative to different ideal aesthetic experiencers.

Such dispassionate evaluation might be unrealistic, but ideal circumstances for aesthetic *experience* are achievable and there are incremental rewards to moving towards the ideal aesthetic experience of an aesthetically valuable work of art (§3.1.2). Even if an ideal aesthetic experience of a work is inescapably emotional, this merely indicates that aesthetic

values can be capacities to elicit emotional experience, and it does not suggest that we emotionally construct aesthetic values as a full-blown Aesthetic Subjectivism might imply.

Although the above Anti-Objectivist theories seem not to pose a challenge to my account, this is partly because my account does include an element of Subjectivism. The order of determination between ideal aesthetic responses and aesthetic values of works is such that ideal aesthetic experiencers experience a work valuably because it is aesthetically valuable, and the judgments of the ideal aesthetic judge would reflect all of the independently determined aesthetic values of works. However, although valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances occur because of the aesthetic values of works, the work itself need not be primary in the constitution of its aesthetic values (§§4.1.1-2).

A work is aesthetically valuable because the ideal aesthetic experiences it is apt to produce are themselves valuable, and this is consistent with those experiences being determined by the aesthetic values of the work. For example, one might be amused by a comedy because it has the positive value of being amusing, but the capacity to amuse is valuable because we enjoy being amused. Aesthetic values determine ideal responses to them, but the values of ideal responses determine the applicability of value concepts to the relevant features of works. I will now make some final remarks about what I have argued are the moderately objective aesthetic values of art.

## 8.5 Moderate Aesthetic Objectivism

Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* is beautiful if and only if a human person may experience the painting as beautiful, where that person is: in the internal and external circumstances generally conducive to the appreciation of works of this kind that have proven themselves durable as providers of valuable aesthetic experience for human beings; as well as the

circumstances necessary to understand this particular work. Such a person would be in a position to detect the beauty of the work, and that beauty is the work's capacity to produce, in at least these circumstances, an aesthetic experience which is itself valuable.

Ontologically objective properties, such as those which dispose *The Last Supper* to produce valuable aesthetic experiences in the above circumstances, can be picked out by response-dependent concepts such as 'beauty'. Ontological objectivity involves a property being there to be discovered and experienced, independently of how it is responded to. We are disposed to respond to things in certain ways, but this only shapes our concepts of the capacities of objects to produce certain experiences; it does not shape the properties of those objects.

Aesthetic value concepts are response-dependent. Depending on how an ideal aesthetic experiencer would respond to a work, the work falls under certain aesthetic value concepts. In virtue of being disposed to offer us aesthetic pleasure, a work is positively aesthetically valuable, and being so disposed depends on how we are disposed to respond.

Epistemic Objectivity involves an awareness of that which is ontologically objective, the ability to infer objective truths and the ability to respond to the world in a disinterested manner. Disagreements over matters objective are explainable by cognitive shortcomings. We make attempts to describe that which is determined independently of our descriptions of it, and we can be more or less successful. Ontological objectivity can come in degrees (§1.1). That which has a nature determined independently of our sensibilities, but which we identify by the use of concepts shaped by our sensibilities, is somewhat objective and somewhat subjective.

Art is the practice of producing objects to perform an aesthetic function: that is, to be aesthetically valuable in the sense of being capable of providing valuable aesthetic experiences. The capacities of an object to produce experiences in certain circumstances are ontologically objective, albeit relative to the relevant potential experiencers. Non-art objects can have such capacities, especially natural objects such as flowers and landscapes (§2.1). To the extent that it makes sense to distinguish between art and nature, it seems that on the one hand art is designed to be experienced and that is necessarily its primary function, whereas nature is not designed at all, and if natural objects have a primary function it is not necessarily to be experienced (§2.1.1).

Beauty and ugliness are the paradigm thin (purely evaluative) aesthetic values, but they supervene on non-evaluative properties of works, and some clue as to the supervenience base for a work's beauty or ugliness may come from the descriptive component of applicable thick aesthetic value concepts. Just as something may be wrong because cruel, something may be ugly because garish, for example.

We pick out aesthetic values with aesthetic value judgments, which are a disinterested type of judgment based on subjective feelings, which imply a universal validity. The universal validity of aesthetic value judgments is in tension with intuitions to the effect that beauty is entirely or largely subjective. Beauty is said to be in the eye of the beholder, and it is said that there is no disputing matters of taste. And yet, we do dispute matters of taste, and we sometimes act as though beauty and other aesthetic values may be learned about by testimony, or may be overlooked or misidentified in an object. As much as we might like to say that no work is objectively better than another, it is difficult to maintain this view when

faced with a contrast such as the sonnets of Shakespeare versus the poems of William McGonagall (§2.3).

A Response-Dependence theory of aesthetic value concepts can resolve the above tension. The enjoyable, imaginative and cognitive experiences offered by perceptual acquaintance with some works of art are the source of their aesthetic values, but the works themselves are the source of these experiences. The aesthetic values of works of art are dispositions to produce subjective experiences, and yet they supervene on properties independent of those experiences and of our dispositions to have them.

## 8.6 Conclusions

The claims that I have defended in this dissertation are as follows. A work *W* has aesthetic value *V* if and only if there could be a human critic in the circumstances ideal for the aesthetic experience of *W* who would experience *W* as having *V*, and the critic would experience *W* as having *V* because *W* has *V*. However, experiencing *W* as having *V* involves having an aesthetic experience *E* which is itself valuable in virtue of being pleasurable in a complex manner involving the imagination and the understanding. Although an ideal aesthetic experiencer would have experience *E* because *W* has *V*, *W* only has *V* because *E* is itself valuable. *V* is, nevertheless, realised by properties of *W* which dispose it to cause *E* in ideal circumstances. Those properties are what is objectively aesthetically valuable in the work.

The consensus that there are apparently large disparities in aesthetic value between works that we call ‘masterpieces’ and certain other works, for example between the respective aesthetic values of the songs of Frank Sinatra and Michael Bubl , or the paintings of Picasso

and those of George W Bush, are justified because works can be more or less capable of eliciting a range of valuable aesthetic experiences in ideal circumstances.

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