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THE VALUE OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

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DEDICATED TO

My mother, Ruth, who taught me to read

My fiancée, Kimmy, who taught me to strive

and

My advisor, Sherri, who taught me to think

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I argue that aesthetic experience is a kind of valuing experience that has certain, objective features not dependent on the psychological state of the subject. Accounts of aesthetic experience can generally be divided into two categories: internalist and externalist. The former pick out aesthetic experience as a being a certain kind of psychological state on the part of the subject, whereas the latter specify it based on features external to the experience itself, usually by reference to the object. My account is neither strictly internalist nor externalist, but combines features of both. Like an internalist account, it requires that the subject be in a certain mental state – the subject must be having a valuational experience. Like an externalist account, it insists that there are features of aesthetic experience that are not part of the phenomenal character of the experience – that is, the type of value assigned is in fact subjective, regardless of how the subject perceives it. It is my contention that such a hybrid account is broadly explanatory while avoiding the problems that plague other accounts.

Chapter One

My primary goal in this dissertation is to articulate an account of aesthetic experience that is independently plausible, not subject to the criticisms that have felled previous accounts, and robust enough to underwrite both an aesthetic of art, the traditional disciplinary focus of aesthetics, as well as an aesthetic of everyday life, which has generated great interest of late. The first step, however, must be to properly define and motivate my program. So it is that in this first chapter I intend to tackle the following questions:

- What is meant by "aesthetic experience?"
- Why is it the sort of thing we ought to care about enough that a philosophical analysis of it is needed?

  and
- Why insist that an account of aesthetic experience be able to underwrite an aesthetic of the everyday?

Although I intend to address these questions each in turn, the answers to each are united by a singular concern for the importance of aesthetic value in human life. Put very briefly, it is my contention that aesthetic value, which we access by means of aesthetic experience, is one of the fundamental ways that human beings organize the world, our concern for it predating the existence of art, much less the philosophical analysis of it. Thus one can already see, in a general sort of way, the manner in which I will answer the questions listed above; that is, the proposition that aesthetic experience is a pervasive and important element of human life will animate my

response to each challenge. By the end of this chapter, I hope to have convinced the reader both that an account of aesthetic experience is necessary and that such an account cannot be adequate to our needs if it does not address aesthetic experiences that go beyond the fine arts or, indeed, any form of art properly so called at all. As such, the greatest part of the chapter shall focus on the as-yet-controversial role of the aesthetic of the everyday in aesthetics broadly speaking. This should not be taken as giving undue attention to just one of the three questions presented above, as my answers to the first two challenges are, in effect, merely prologue to the answer I give to the last. Still, we cannot jump directly to the end of the case, so let us begin with the most basic question: what do we mean by "aesthetic experience"?

Getting Clear on "Aesthetic Experience"

Suppose you are shown several swatches of different colors, each swatch a single uniform shade but each swatch also distinct from the others. Some you like better than the rest – perhaps you favor blue swatches to orange ones or green ones to yellow ones. Assuming that there is no immediate practical value to preferring the ones you do to the ones you don't, the question of why some seem better to you than the others is a question apparently without an answer. It just seems a brute, irreducible fact that you prefer blue to orange. This case stands in contrast to other cases of discrimination between alternatives such as in making moral choices, where the fact that alternative A seems better than alternative B can be explained by reference to certain more basic elements of each situation (alternative A is in accord

with what you'd will universally, has better consequences, is more conducive to virtue, etc.).

I take it that if anything counts as an aesthetic preference, the foregoing case does. Choosing one color over another just because you like it better seems like a paradigm example of what people mean (however loosely) when they talk about aesthetic preferences and aesthetic choices. Likewise, I take it that the phenomenology that underwrites aesthetic preferences like the one posited above is the essence of what it is to have an aesthetic experience. Wittgenstein offers a similar example that, I think, gets at the same basic intuition:

> Suppose you are fitting a door in a wall and marking out the place for the frame. You will step back from time to time and ask yourself: does that look right? This is a real question but it is not a question that can be answered in functional or utilitarian terms. The doorframe may be just what is needed for the traffic to pass through, it may comply with all requirements of health and safety, but it may simply not look right.[1]

Though he also speaks in terms of judgments and preferences, Wittgenstein is talking about aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experiences are how we form aesthetic judgments. Between this and my own example, I believe most readers will by now have some idea of what we are driving at when we talk about "aesthetic experience."

This discursive "teasing out" of the idea, however, is a far cry from any sort of precise analysis of the concept, which is what I aim to offer in this dissertation. Though Wittgenstein himself despaired of the possibility of even defining "aesthetic

[1] I came to this passage in Christopher Dowling, "The Aesthetics of Everyday Life," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 50:3 (2010), p. 225. He cites the passage as quoted in Roger Scruton, "In Search of the Aesthetic," *BJA*, 47 (2007), pp. 239-40. Scruton himself cites Wittgenstein, *Letters and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), p. 13.

experience,"[2] I see no reason we should so despair as long as we believe we have the means to speak of experience more generally. That is, if we can profitably analyze the genus *experience*, it strikes me as pessimistic to conclude that we are incapable of finding plausible differentia.[3] Of course, I have found that few discussions of aesthetic experience treat experience *simpliciter* and none to my knowledge do so in a highly systematic fashion for the purpose of constraining the discussion of the species in question. As such a project could take up the space of a dissertation in its own right, my present discussion will not be such an in-depth analysis, either. However, it strikes me as both useful and feasible within the constraints of space and my own expertise to start with a discussion of experience as such in light of what we already think of aesthetic experience, in general terms, as a way of at least testing whether our intuitions about aesthetic experience comport with any plausible account of experience *simpliciter*. In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss briefly the general intuitions that seem to be agreed upon with regard to aesthetic experience before checking them against the literature on experience more generally, to see if "aesthetic experience" as we conceive of it is even a plausible phenomenon.

Since the purpose of our general exploration of experience is to see whether the literature on experience will pose any problems for going accounts of *aesthetic* experience, we must first, quite briefly, note what are taken to be the general features of most accounts of aesthetic experience. Without pinning down the specifics of any

[2] Tomlin, Adele. "Introduction," *Aesthetic Experience*, eds. Richard Shusterman and Adele Tomlin. Routledge: New York, 2008. p. 1.

[3] And, if it seems we are, perhaps we should abandon the idea of aesthetic experience as incoherent, rather than retain it with the dodge that it "cannot be described in logical terms."

given account of aesthetic experience, Adele Tomlin, in Richard Shusterman and Tomlin's *Aesthetic Experience*, neatly summarizes the four characteristics that her co-editor argues are "central to the tradition of aesthetic experience."[4] I take her characterization of Shusterman to be accurate and further find Shusterman's observations enlightening. The features Shusterman singles out are the *evaluative dimension*, the *phenomenological dimension*, the *semantic dimension*, and the *demarcational-definitional dimension*. The evaluative dimension of aesthetic experience accounts is the tradition of characterizing such experiences as "essentially valuable and enjoyable."[5] The phenomenological dimension refers to the tendency to represent aesthetic experience as something "vividly felt and subjectively savored."[6] The semantic dimension of such accounts differentiates aesthetic experience from mere sensation by insisting that "it is meaningful experience."[7] Finally, the demarcational-definitional dimension of the aesthetic experience tradition is the strain of thinking that positions aesthetic experience as a distinctive characteristic of our interactions with fine art.[8] As Shusterman points out, these features, as characterized, "generate theoretical tensions" that threaten the very project of providing an analysis

[4] Tomlin, Adele. "Introduction," *Aesthetic Experience*, eds. Richard Shusterman and Adele Tomlin. Routledge: New York, 2008. pp. 2-3. Tomlin is here referring to Shusterman, Richard. "The End of Aesthetic Experience." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 55:1 (1997), pp.29-41. I cite Tomlin here rather than Shusterman because it is Tomlin's concise summary I find most useful for my present aims, as well as because there's a lot more going on in Shusterman's paper than just identifying these four elements.
[5] *ibid.* Tomlin
[6] ibid.
[7] ibid.
[8] ibid.

of aesthetic experience.[9] Yet I think the literature's preoccupation with these features, generally speaking, tells us something about intuitions regarding aesthetic experience. At the very least, we can take these as a starting point for "roughing out" our minimal requirements. It is our hope that a plausible analysis of experience is available that allows us to proffer an analysis of aesthetic experience that has all four of these characteristics. If not, we must hold our account of aesthetic experience to be somewhat radical. Let's now look at these four characteristics in a little more detail, so we'll be able to keep a weather eye out for conflict when we come to the analysis of experience more generally.

Let's review these four features while keeping in mind the examples that opened this section. That aesthetic experience is "meaningful" in the sense that it is not mere sensation, but has conceptual content, I can agree with unreservedly.[10] To begin with, judgments of value are conceptual in character, so if we think that aesthetic experiences are evaluative in nature, we must take the position that aesthetic experience is meaningful. Of course, even if we were inclined to deny this, the fact would still remain that, as was shown by Arthur Danto in *The Transfiguration*

[9] Shusterman, Richard. "The End of Aesthetic Experience." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55:1 (1997), p.30.

[10] An astute reader might note that this claim is apparently at odds with my earlier claim that "brute" color preference is a paradigm case of aesthetic preference. At least one notable aesthetician would see a problem with the claim: Kant, in the *Critique of Judgment*, assigns pleasing colors to the category of the agreeable, rather than the beautiful (Div. I, §7), and equates the agreeable with *sensory* rather than cognitive pleasure (Div. I, §3). While this is not the place to delve deeply into the issue – I will answer this criticism in Chapter Four – suffice it to say that I disagree with the supposition that preference for one color over another is always or even normally a matter of pure sensory stimulation, holding instead that there is cognitive content to such preferences. As a foretaste of my eventual argument on this point, I offer both that color preference is generally context-dependent (that is, one does not simply prefer blue to red, one prefers blue to red for clothing, say, but perhaps the converse holds when considering what color of car is desired) and culturally-conditioned.

of the Commonplace, we respond to and make aesthetic judgments about many properties of artworks that cannot be captured by a simple description of their sensuous surfaces. Thus our account of aesthetic experience must allow that experience can contain conceptual content, and in turn our account of experience as such is likewise constrained.

The other features I agree with only in a qualified sense. Though it has been argued in many places that aesthetic experience should not be restricted to valuable experiences *per se*, there's something right about insisting that aesthetic experiences are often (possibly even always) *evaluative*. My preference *for* blue swatches *as well as* my *dis*-preference toward orange swatches figure into or contribute to my aesthetic experience. Now, some will wish to dispute this, arguing that the evaluation or aesthetic judgment is based *on* rather than part *of* the aesthetic experience. I disagree for reasons that will be fully explained later. For now, it is enough to note that the requirement that aesthetic experience be capable of bearing conceptual content "swamps" this concern. That is, we needn't take a position on whether aesthetic experiences *include* or simply *underwrite* value judgments, since any such value assignment would just be another kind of conceptual content.

Likewise, while the most notable aesthetic experiences tend to be "vividly felt," of course, it does not offend intuition to suggest that there could be aesthetic experiences that are modest or even bland. Indeed, the experience of the door in Wittgenstein's example is most likely rather mild, possibly even subtle. Whatever the specifics, though, there is in all these cases a "what it's like" or phenomenology to the

experience. That is, an aesthetic experience has a certain phenomenal character, which means our concept of experience must allow that experiences have a phenomenological element.

Finally, while it does seem that aesthetic experience is somehow central to the aim of art, it must not be restricted to our artistic endeavors, as our examples – if they are accepted – obviously show that we have aesthetic experiences of all sorts of things that are not art. Thus, we do not need to add any kind of object requirement to our conception of experience. Moreover, we *ought not* add any kind of object requirement – that is, our concept of experience and aesthetic experience alike should not be delimited as having only certain kinds of objects.

This is a quick gloss, of course; where it is necessary in future chapters, more extensive argument will be given for these particular interpretations. For now, though, we can offer some observations about what our theory of aesthetic experience must look like. It must conceive of aesthetic experience as having conceptual rather than merely sensuous content, it must allow that aesthetic experiences have – possibly essentially – an evaluative component, it must be capable of addressing the phenomenology of aesthetic experience, and it must be applicable to "routine" experiences as well as experiences of art. These observations, in turn, constrain our working theory of experience more generally. In particular, it must specify that experience both has (or can have, at minimum) conceptual content (that can include value judgments) and has a phenomenological component. Before we can move on,

then, we must be assured there are non-controversial accounts of experience available to us that meet these criteria.

A Suitable Conception of Experience

It's beyond the scope of this project to get into all the arguments about experience generally conceived. As philosophers, we cannot be experts in everything, yet we will often find that deliberations in one area will bear consequences for deliberations in a wholly different subfield. In such cases, we must rely on the work of experts in the relevant field, as I shall do in this section. I offer no argumentative support for the positions mentioned herein, relying instead on the "division of labor" in contemporary philosophy – a polite way of saying that as I am not a specialist in philosophy of mind, I will simply take note of my colleagues' conclusions and how they bear on my present project.

We can begin by noting that it is widely held that experience can have conceptual content[11], with only Michael Ayers defending the view that experience is entirely non-conceptual in nature.[12] Although the rest are divided as to whether experience is always or only sometimes conceptual in nature, the general consensus that at least *some* experiential content is conceptual is perfectly compatible with

[11] McDowell, John. *Mind and World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994; Oguchi, Mineki. "In Defense of Conceptualism of Perceptual Content: Through Understanding the Concept of Experience in McDowell's *Mind and World*." *Archive for Philosophy and the History of Science.* Vol.10, Section of Philosophy and the History of Science, College of Arts and Science, The University of Tokyo. (2008) p. 119; Ginsborg, Hannah. "Empirical Concepts and the Content of Experience." *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14:3 (2006). p. 349.

[12] Most pointedly, but not exclusively, in "Is Perceptual Content Ever Conceptual?" *Philosophical Books*, 43:1 (2002). pp. 5-17.

developing an account of specifically *aesthetic* experience that is conceptual in nature.[13]

That bird in hand, we now turn to the question of whether experience can be said to have phenomenal content. Now, in a certain way, this is a trivial question: *of course* experiences have phenomenal content, inasmuch as they are experiences a subject has of something. We are, however, concerned not with whether experience has a phenomenal character insofar as it has representational content, but with whether it has a phenomenal character *beyond* that content as well. That is, we are asking whether it is plausible to suppose that experiences can have phenomenal characteristics *in themselves.*

Why would it be important to an account of aesthetic experience that experience as such be able to bear a phenomenological component in itself? In the first place, while there seems to be wide agreement that aesthetic experience is valuable in itself, even those who would argue that it is only valuable inasmuch as it allows for epistemic access to aesthetic value or underwrites aesthetic judgments do not, to my knowledge, attempt to deny that there is a notable phenomenological character to aesthetic experience. Paul Crowther, for instance, characterizes the aesthetic experience as a kind of response to the world that "focus[es] on its sensible,

[13] There is, of course, an entire paper, possibly even an entire dissertation, in hashing out the specific implications of various views on the conceptual content of experience for various accounts of aesthetic experience. While I acknowledge this, I do not intend to pursue that project here. My only goal was to show that it was a plausible position, given the general state of the literature on experience, to assert that aesthetic experience is conceptual in nature. It seems to be so, and thus I shall move on.

or imaginatively-intended character,"[14] while Jeffery Petts specifically characterizes aesthetic experience as a "human *felt* response to the world."[15] Richard Shusterman evocatively observes that aesthetic experience "is something undergone or suffered," which is indicative of its "transformational, passional aspect."[16] Without belaboring the point with further quotes – though many are available – it is safe to say that most conceptions of aesthetic experience, regardless of what other commitments the author makes with regard to related issues (aesthetic judgment, aesthetic value, etc.), require an account of experience that allows for experiences to have a phenomenal character.

If we take it that aesthetic judgment is a constituent part of aesthetic experience, as I will argue it is under my account, the need for such an account of experience is felt more sharply. Such judgments, *ex hypothesi* part of aesthetic experiences, just are phenomenal in character. In Wittgenstein's door-frame example, we do not take the subject to *deduce* that the door-frame isn't "right," nor do we take the locution that it doesn't "look right" to be metaphorical. Rather, the door-frame really doesn't look right, with "look" being read forcefully here – the "rightness" or lack thereof is part of the phenomenological character of the experience of the door. Under such a theory – my theory, as it happens - in the process of having an aesthetic experience of the door-frame, the subject does not simply attend to the shape and

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[14] Crowther, Paul. "The aesthetic: from experience to art," *Aesthetic Experience*, Richard Shusterman and Adele Tomlin, eds., New York: Routledge (2008), p. 31.
[15] Petts, Jeffrey, "Aesthetic Experience and the Revelation of Value," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58:1 (2000), p. 81. Emphasis mine.
[16] Shusterman, Richard, "The End of Aesthetic Experience," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Critcism*, 55:1 (1997), p. 30.

color of the object but also to the *way* the object looks to him or her (in this case, "not right"). Such a stance would be ruled out by an account of experience in which the phenomenal character of the experience can be exhausted by specifying the representational content. Even if it weren't the case that we would need to formulate an account of experience that rejected this claim in order to fit with the general view of aesthetic experience, we would need to do so in order to get an account of experience that comports with *my* view of aesthetic experience.

Now, worryingly for me, just this sort of account is defended by several thinkers, such as Gilbert Harman and Michael Tye.[17] They defend an *intentionalist* view of experience, which just says that "you are aware of objects and qualities of things you perceive, but you are not aware of your own experience, or its features."[18] Such a view is taken by its partisans to indicate that "introspection has no phenomenology" and that there is no phenomenologically-substantive inner sense. [19] Whether or not we nowadays hold with a theory of taste as such, most discussions of aesthetic experience seem to take for granted the idea that there is some sort of phenomenological character to our experiences themselves. Indeed, the feature that seems to distinguish aesthetic experience from mere sensory experience seems to be that there's some sort of phenomenology, some "what-it's-like-ness" to the experience itself that cannot be captured in a mere specification of the object of experience. To see a particular

[17] Harman, G. "The Intrinsic Quality of Experience", *Philosophical Perspectives, vol. 4,* J. Tomberlin ed., Atascadero: Ridgeview (1990); and Tye, Michael, *Ten Problems of Consciousness*, Cambridge: MIT (1995).
[18] As explained by Charles Siewert, "Is Experience Transparent?" *Philosophical Studies*. 117: 1-2 (2004), p. 16. Siewert notes that Tye "explicitly endorses this way of putting things," so I assume the formulation is suitably charitable.
[19] *ibid*., p. 39, f. 1, quoting Fred Dretske.

block of wood is a sensory experience, but to see that block of wood *and* have some immediate experience of it as "pretty" or "striking," say, seems to be having an experience of a certain "flavor" – an experience with a distinct phenomenology of its own.[20] Unfortunately, at current the weight of scholarship seems to be in favor of the transparency thesis that seems so threatening to our aims. As noted by Amy Kind, "…even taking into account isolated voices of dissent… there nonetheless appears to be a broad philosophical consensus surrounding the transparency thesis."[21] This poses a problem for us: unless we are willing to radically redefine aesthetic experience, we need to find some evidence in the literature on experience more generally that non-transparency is a plausible position to hold.

Transparency and Aesthetic Experience

Charles Siewert notes that a number of thinkers claim that experience is transparent, by which is meant "…when you try to focus attention on consciousness or experience itself, you find you cannot: attention 'passes through' straight to the object you are conscious of – the object you experience."[22] We are aware *that* we have experiences, but not *of* our experiences.[23] Philosophers such as Gilbert Harman and Michael Tye (though not *only* they) "invite us to try to attend to our own experience,"

[20] While it is the case that one experiences the block of wood as *being* "pretty" or "striking," what I am suggesting here is that there is a particular phenomenological character to having, for lack of a better way of putting it, "pretty experiences." The point, I believe, generalizes.
[21] Kind, Amy. "What's so Transparent about Transparency?" *Philosophical Studies*. 115:3 (2003), p. 228.
[22] Siewert, Charles, "Is Experience Transparent?" *Philosophical Studies* 117 (2004), p. 15.
[23] *ibid.*, p. 16.

confident that we will not be able to do so.[24] The "finding" of transparency is cited as evidence of a view I'll call, for the sake of consistency, intentionalism.[25]

Now, I'm not sure what to make of this supposed evidence for transparency. It strikes me, at first blush, as straightforwardly mistaken. Surely, when I wake up and look around my room and everything looks blurry, only for the world to become clear when I blink and rub my eyes and allow myself to wake up a little more, the difference between these two experiences is purely one of phenomenology and not one of content. One might counter, here, that it is uncharitable to construe "the object of visual experience" as consisting of *just* the external objects rather than some complex of those *as well as* the experience itself. However, Michael Tye is explicit in holding just this line, and his claims are representative of the general line of argument taken by defenders of the transparency thesis. In *Consciousness, Color, and Content*, Tye makes his position clear in a number of places, but most notably with the following passages:

> "To suppose that the qualities of which perceives are directly aware in undergoing ordinary, everyday visual experiences are really qualities of the experiences… is just not credible… Accordingly, the qualities of which you are directly aware in focusing on the scene before your eyes and how things look are not qualities of your visual experience."[26]
>
> and
>
> "If you are attending to how things *look* to you, as opposed to how they are independent of how they look, you are bringing to bear your faculty of introspection. But in doing so, you are not aware of any inner object or thing.

[24] *ibid.*, pp. 15-6.
[25] Siewert notes that there are several names one might apply to the view, but he allows that "intentionalism" is an apt one. Jeff Speaks, whose work we'll be coming to shortly, uses the term "intentionalism" exclusively, and it's the one I prefer.
[26] Tye, *Color, Consciousness, and Content*, Cambridge: MIT, 2002. p. 46.

> The only objects of which you are aware are the external ones making up the scene before your eyes."[27]

Tye does not make clear exactly what something like the blurriness of my vision when first awakening would be an experience *of* if it is not part of my visual experience; this otherwise-empty conceptual space will be put to good use later (see below).

In any case, "is so"/"is not" debates about private experiences are not philosophically productive, and obviously the "finding" of transparency has at least enough *prima facie* plausibility to attract a not-insignificant following. Fortunately, there's a more respectable and useful way to argue against transparency. Intentionalism is taken to follow directly from transparency.[28] Thus, a viable counter-example to intentionalism would be, via *modus tollens*, an argument against transparency, the introspections of Tye, et al., notwithstanding. Both Charles Siewert and Jeff Speaks believe they can offer just such an argument against intentionalism. While they offer distinct arguments, the arguments have something in common that is useful to us for our present purposes.

While Siewert relies on Tye's account of intentionalism since it "seems one of the more explicit and sustained discussions" of the view,[29] I'm going to introduce intentionalism using Jeff Speaks' boiled-down explanation of it, both because it seems to capture Tye's account (and, indeed, Speaks cites Tye's account in offering his own

[27] *ibid*., pp. 46-7, emphasis in original.
[28] Siewert, pp. 18-20; Speaks, p. 326.
[29] Siewert, pp. 17-8.

formulation of intentionalism)[30] but also because I think he captures the core of the view in terms that are clear and in a way that focuses the debate on what is relevant to our present discussion. Speaks observes that "the core of intentionalism in the philosophy of perception" is that "if two perceptual experiences of the same sense modality differ in phenomenology, then they differ in content."[31] In other words, given disparate contents x and y, the two experiences could have the same phenomenology, p, if y was, say, a clever illusion of x. However, given two experiences with different phenomenologies, p and p', we could not have just one set of contents, x. This precludes a scenario under which all possible objective aspects of a perceptual experience remain the same, such as my position relative to the object perceived, lighting, etc., and yet I have two successive, phenomenologically distinct experiences (in the same sense modality).

That said, this view allows for some latitude in what counts as content, or "represented properties," in the jargon of the debate. Speaks notes that the defender of intentionalism can unproblematically claim that, for example, orientation and relative location are properties legitimately present in our experiences. Consider two trees of equal height at differing distances from the viewer – the fact that the experiences have different phenomenal characters (one seems bigger to the viewer than the other, despite being of equal height) is explained by a genuine difference in content: their disparate relative locations. Without being able to place relative position under the rubric of "content," the two visual experiences have the same content,

[30] Speaks, Jeff, "Attention and Intentionalism," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 60:239 (2010), p. 326.
[31] *ibid.*, p. 325.

which would be a problem since they have obviously different phenomenologies.[32] So the category of represented properties can include things that are represented "indirectly," if you will. This strategy can even be used to explain the differing phenomenological content in such optical illusions as the well-known duck-rabbit drawing – in this case, the two ways of seeing the object (viewed being "duck-shaped" or, alternately being viewed being"rabbit-shaped") are each part of the content of the respective visual experiences.[33]

Speaks, however, offers what he believes to be a counter-example to this "core of intentionalism," or, as he terms it, *minimal intentionalism*.[34] I won't here go into the details of his very technical argument, but he offers an example of an optical illusion which generates two phenomenologically distinct visual experiences that cannot be explained in terms of the object viewed taking on different represented shapes, as with the duck-rabbit. The shift in phenomenology depends, according to Speaks, entirely on where the subject's attention is directed. As one cannot plausibly claim that the focus of one's attention is *part of* the perceptual content of a visual experience, that seems to leave only the possibility that the focus of attention is a phenomenal characteristic of the visual experience itself – in other words, a straightforward denial of intentionalism and, and, consequently, the transparency thesis.[35]

[32] Numerical distinctness not being a represented property.
[33] *ibid*., pp. 327-8.
[34] *ibid.*, p. 325.
[35] *ibid.*, p. 329-33.

We are offered two possible responses to this. One is that intentionalism is simply false: "…content and phenomenology are two distinct sorts of properties of perceptual experiences, which may be systematically, but only contingently, correlated."[36] The other is intriguing enough that I want to introduce it in Speaks' own words:

> There is a clear sense in which these kinds of shifts in attention are not part of specifically visual phenomenology at all: similar cases can easily be generated for any of the other sense modalities. (One can listen to a duet in an otherwise silent environment while shifting the focus of attention to one voice or the other.) So perhaps the minimal intentionalist should respond to these cases not by trying to find some representational difference between the two experiences, but by thinking of attention as having its own *sui generis* phenomenology, which is distinct from visual phenomenology, auditory phenomenology, and the phenomenologies specific to the other sense modalities.[37]

I'll talk about this "phenomenology of attention" move in more detail below, but first I'll mention Siewert's response to intentionalism, which, in the end, resembles Speaks'. Simplifying Siewert's argument considerably, as much of it deals with the intricate details of matters important to the literature of experience but beyond the scope of our concern, Siewert essentially rests on the fact that the subject is aware of his own involvement in all perceptual experiences. The claim that experience has no phenomenal character in itself is, according to him, more or less based on verbal legerdemain.[38]

> For just what is meant by "the phenomenal character of experience"? I would say that my having an experience with a certain phenomenal character is none other than my having a given phenomenal feature. Whether one speaks of the

[36] *ibid.*, p. 333.
[37] op. cit.
[38] Siewert, pp. 22-3.

> phenomenal features a person has, or of the phenomenal character her experience has, marks a merely verbal difference.[39]

Siewert goes on to assert that it is obvious that one can attend to one's own phenomenal features. One is aware not only of the content of one's visual experiences (for example), but also of the fact that they are presenting themselves in a specific way to him. In Siewert's words, "When something looks blue or square to me… and I attend to how it looks to me, I do not somehow attend just to blueness or squareness, without attending to its *looking* blue or square to me."[40] He bolsters this intuition by pointing out that in many cases, a subject is unable to immediately put a name to a particular object of perception and is forced to refer, even if just privately, to the phenomenon as "the thing that appears the way it does to me," or something like that.[41] In other words, there is an awareness of the subjectivity of perception that permeates our experiences, without which we would in some cases be unable to adequately identify certain phenomena. As he says, "[i]f this is right, there are often cases in which we have, introspectively, no way to conceive of just what it appears to us something is, but by attending to its appearing to us as it does."[42]

Both Siewert and Speaks are describing a kind of second-order perception, a perception *of* perception, grounded, ultimately, in self-awareness. Their arguments strike me as plausible not only on their own merits but also because many thinkers describe aesthetic experience as a kind of second-order experience, something that comes about as a result of attending to first-order (often, purely sensory) experiences.

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[39] *ibid.*, p. 22.
[40] *ibid.*, p. 20. Emphasis in original.
[41] *ibid.*, pp. 28-9.
[42] *ibid.*, p. 29.

Though all we were after in investigating the transparency debate was a conception of experience that would not pose a problem for our account of aesthetic experience, what we seem to have here is a resolution to the transparency debate that draws the discussion on experience generally speaking much closer to the general intuitions on aesthetic experience. That is an unexpected bonus, but the responses to the transparency thesis offered us by Siewert and Speaks are, in any case, enough to give us a place to "set our feet" when trying to situate aesthetic experience in the larger discussion of experience.

Why Care About Aesthetic Experience?

Having described the intuitions we traditionally expect to be honored in any account of aesthetic experience and confirmed that they are compatible with the general thrust of thinking about experience more generally speaking, we must now turn to the question of motivation – why care about getting a correct account of aesthetic experience? Owing to the great influence of the empiricist tradition, there is certainly something at stake in getting right an account of *experience* as such, and – as we saw in the previous section – a great deal of ink has been spilled on that issue. The value of getting right an account of aesthetic experience, on the other hand, is perhaps not so obvious. As proposing just such an account is my central aim in this dissertation, it seems incumbent on me to justify my efforts.

As I see it, there are two possible motivations for wanting a correct account of aesthetic experience. Either one thinks aesthetic experience is simply good in itself, in which case it is obvious that one should want a correct account of it, or aesthetic

experience is good inasmuch as it is good for apprehending aesthetic value. If we take it that the former is the case, we hardly need go further in explaining why we're after a proper account of aesthetic experience; it is only if we assume the latter rather than the former that we need to do a little more work to justify our interest. In that case, we might observe that aesthetic experience is widely believed to be our only epistemic access to aesthetic value, inasmuch as we cannot deduce its presence from a specification of the object of consideration nor apprehend it through testimony (which is contrasted to the way that we can, in fact, get epistemically valuable states via testimony).[43] If we are not prepared to accept that aesthetic experience just is valuable in itself, then this is the first move in answering the question of why we care about aesthetic experience: shifting the focus from aesthetic experience to aesthetic value. In the interest of making the strongest case I can for caring about aesthetic experience, I will assume for the sake of argument that we do not accept that aesthetic experience is just valuable in itself.

So, then, why care about aesthetic value? This question is both easier and harder to answer than the question as posed about aesthetic experience. It is easier inasmuch as what is aesthetically valuable is commonly held to be to that extent intrinsically valuable. But just because something is intrinsically valuable doesn't mean we should care about it; that is, the *mode* of value it holds says nothing about the *significance* of the value. There's nothing incoherent about claiming that something

[43] This view has been called into question by Jon Robson ("Aesthetic Testimony," *Philosophy Compass*, 7:1 (2012), pp. 1-10). If it is the case that we can apprehend aesthetic value without aesthetic experience *and* we do not think aesthetic experience is valuable in itself, the motivation for getting a correct account of aesthetic experience is somewhat vitiated but not, I think, eliminated.

could possess more or less insignificant value that it nonetheless holds intrinsically, in contrast to something that holds a great deal of "mere" instrumental value. So noting that aesthetic value is intrinsic is not sufficient to explain why we should care about it. Addressing this issue, however, is challenging. By definition, there's no use pointing to some other salubrious effect to explain why we ought care about something we value intrinsically. If we took that approach, we would no longer be arguing that the thing we value is valued intrinsically: the real appeal would be to some other kind of value. At best, when trying to justify the claim that we should care about something that is thought to have intrinsic value, one can tell a story about how we as humans do, in fact, treat the thing under consideration as if we care about it a great deal and hope that story accords with the reader's intuitions. I have such a story, but telling it involves answering the third of our initial questions – that is, I believe the story that best explains why we care so much about aesthetic value judgments inextricably involves appeal to our everyday aesthetic concerns. In the next section, I will discuss why it is I think we both do and should care about our everyday aesthetic experiences. If my work in the next section is successful, I will have established a reason to care about aesthetic experiences in general, from which it should fall out that we also care about aesthetic experiences of art. So I will proceed directly to the questions regarding quotidian aesthetic experience in the hopes that an answer to our present question – why care about aesthetic experience? – will be answered in the process of answering those questions.

Why Does Our Account Need to Underwrite Everyday Aesthetic Experiences?

In developing an account of aesthetic experience that can encompass everyday aesthetic experiences as well as experiences of fine art, one is confronted by two questions:

1) Should we care at all about "everyday" aesthetic experiences?, and
2) Is this work that can be done by existing (art-centric) accounts?

These questions strike at the motivation for such an account. Perhaps the judgment of whether a doorframe "looks right" is an aesthetic judgment (based on a quotidian aesthetic experience). Question 1 is, in so many words, "what of it?" It has not yet been demonstrated that anything worth caring about – beyond door-frame-specific personal fulfillment – hangs on such seemingly trivial experiences, which in turn calls into question the wisdom of devoting our energy to an analysis of them. Even if we can demonstrate that the answer to Question 1 is "yes," we are then faced with the possibility that no new, "liberal" account of aesthetic experience is necessary and that existing, art-based accounts are adequate for analyzing these experiences. Although Yuriko Saito approaches these questions in the reverse order, the order I've given them seems to me the most logical approach – after all, why care whether or not "art-centric" accounts can adequately describe everyday aesthetic experiences if such experiences are nugatory? A negative answer to the first question obviates the need to even attempt an answer to the second. Motivating my project requires offering a positive and a negative answer to these two questions, respectively.

Obviously, I take it that there is a positive answer to the first question, as do a number of other scholars. Despite a general neglect of the aesthetics of the everyday, one does not, as a rule, encounter specific arguments *against* concern for quotidian aesthetics. Nonetheless, it is intellectually responsible to offer motivation for broaching the issue of aesthetics, especially given that, as Yuriko Saito notes, "…in the actual practice of aesthetics, art is almost always regarded as the quintessential model for an aesthetic object."[44] This preoccupation not only requires some attempt to address the first question, it will become the central contentious issue in answering the second.

Though, as a rule, one encounters only the unreflective assumption that non-art objects should be analyzed under a conceptual framework originally developed for dealing with art, Christopher Dowling has offered an argument specifically against developing a separate aesthetic of daily life. Since he regards Yuriko Saito's arguments for such a distinct aesthetic as "perhaps the most developed exploration and defense of the aesthetics of daily life to date," he focuses most of his comments on her work. I agree with Dowling that Saito's defense of a distinct quotidian aesthetic is particularly thorough; likewise, Dowling's argument against such a separate aesthetic is the most interesting and lucid argument I've seen for that position, even given the manifest flaws I will show in the following sections.[45] The next sections will therefore focus primarily on the debate between Saito and Dowling. I will discuss Roger Scruton's

[44] Saito, Yuriko. *Everyday Aesthetics*. Oxford: OUP, 2010. p. 13

[45] The dearth of sustained arguments against developing a separate aesthetic of everyday life is perhaps a reflection of the historical inertia on the side of the opinion that aesthetics is *primarily* about the analysis of art.

argument for taking an interest in everyday aesthetics inasmuch as it lays ground for Dowling's arguments, and Sherri Irvin's arguments for the same because Dowling takes them to support his own thesis, while I believe Dowling is mistaken and that Irvin's analysis actually supports Saito's conclusions. In the end, having used the Dowling-Saito debate as a framework for exploring the possible answers to the two questions posed above, I will offer my own analysis of the problem.

Why Care About Everyday Aesthetic Experience?

Irvin

In "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience,"[46] Sherri Irvin takes note of several reasons why we ought care about everyday aesthetic experiences, as advanced by other authors, and additionally develops her own argument to this effect. I'll first canvass the former cases, then deal with the argument she develops explicitly.

The first reason for thinking we ought to care about the aesthetic in everyday experience is one for which Irvin credits Richard Shusterman.[47] Irvin offers the following: the so-called "minor moments" of our lives constitute a great deal of our lives, so – in the interest of self-knowledge – we ought to pay attention to them.[48] I think this is a fine point and certainly enough to motivate me, but my intuitions run toward an interest in everyday aesthetics already. It seems that someone whose

[46] Irvin, Sherri. "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience." *British Journal of Aesthetics*. 48:1 (2008). pp. 29-44.
[47] Whether Shusterman intended his comments to be an argument for attention to everyday aesthetics is irrelevant to the merits of the argument as presented, so I'll focus entirely on Irvin's (brief) comments on the matter.
[48] *ibid.*, p.40.

intuitions do not run in such a direction would have a ready reply, thusly: if we assume, as the argument seems to, that we already do not pay much attention to the "minor moments" of our life, why think that – even accumulated – they significantly inform our character, outlook, what-have-you? This argument is wanting a premise to establish that these "minor moments" aren't just "in one ear, out the other," so to speak. If they are, then the force of the point is lost. Again, my intuitions on this matter are in line with Irvin's, but I don't think this point can be pressed (in its present form) against anyone whose intuitions are not so aligned. That said, it seems Irvin doesn't think so, either, given the fact that she passes quickly over this line of advance to other arguments. On the assumption that we'll need something more than brute appeal to intuition to motivate my project, we'll continue.

The next argument that Irvin mentions she characterizes as an hedonic argument. I think of it as more of an "aesthetic rights" argument, but we'll get into that shortly. As she says, "[w]e deserve better than to have our ordinary pleasures, the ones which animate our day-to-day existence, dismissed as insignificant, and our ability to appreciate them accordingly diminished."[49] Again, my own intuitions make it difficult for me to judge exactly how persuasive a neutral party would find this argument, but I can see a response available to those who wish to rebut.

I take that for the purposes of this discussion, "hav[ing] our ordinary pleasures… dismissed as insignificant…" saliently entails not having a proper analysis of the everyday aesthetic; any other consequence is immaterial to the present issue,

[49] *op. cit.*, again referencing comments in this vein by Shusterman.

which is whether this constitutes a good reason to develop an aesthetic theory that can adequately explain everyday aesthetic experiences. Given that, it's not clear that failing to include an analysis of the everyday in our aesthetic theory diminishes our ability to appreciate such quotidian experiences, especially if we think that they fall into the scope of what Kant would have called the pleasurable. As "mere" pleasures, such responses would not be amenable to aesthetic analysis in the first place, putting them outside the realm of critical discourse. Since, *ex hypothesi*, having an aesthetic analysis only serves our appreciation of the arts inasmuch as it makes possible critical discourse that serves to enhance our appreciation of the arts, there could be no loss to our "appreciation" (such as it is) of the everyday in not being able to apply aesthetic analysis to it, as we do not engage in such discourse to enhance our appreciation of the everyday. So one could turn away the force of this point by asserting that our everyday aesthetic experiences are simply pleasurable experiences. I believe there are responses available here, but we'll treat those in just a bit, as exploring those responses is tied up in my own argument for an analysis of everyday aesthetics.

Irvin also advances two moral arguments, one of which seems to be significantly informed by the work of other philosophers, while the other appears to be original to Irvin. Both depend on seeing everyday aesthetic experiences as "relevant insofar as they affect my tendency to do or pursue what is morally good."[50] I will give my own critique of each argument as we examine them.

[50] *ibid.*, p. 41

The first line of thought advises increased attention to everyday aesthetic opportunities as a way of increasing our opportunities for fulfillment without turning to increased consumerism, which is taken to be a bad thing. Irvin suggests that if we can "…learn to discover and appreciate the aesthetic character of experiences that are already available to us, perhaps we will be less inclined to think that we must acquire new goods that make different experiences available."[51] This argument positions quotidian aesthetic experience not as morally good *per se* but as obviously less-morally-bad than the alternative, which is a sort of grasping materialism.

While this argument is *prima facie* plausible, there are numerous potential problems.[52] I do *not* take it to be a problem that there are other less-morally-bad alternatives to the thoughtless consumerism that "leads to exhaustion of natural resources and harm to the environment"[53]. The notion that it might be morally salubrious to attend to everyday aesthetic experiences does *not* require that it be the *only* alternative to thoughtless consumerism, merely *an* alternative, on the theory that "every little bit helps." Still, this argument does depend on accepting not only specific moral positions about, *inter alia*, the environment, but also on accepting that the aesthetic content of our everyday experiences is sufficiently rich and textured to act as a reasonable substitute for the aesthetic gratification one might derive from Humvees and iPods, as it were. While I think there are arguments available to answer these worries, I'm in search of a justification for caring about everyday aesthetics that

[51] *ibid.*, p. 42
[52] Which I think we can infer Irvin recognizes, given the repeated use of "perhaps" and "it may be" in laying out this argument. This is no failing of Irvin's, since this isn't even her primary argument for the importance of everyday aesthetics.
[53] *ibid.*, p. 41

doesn't require quite so much side-work. This argument, while intuitively appealing to me personally, is not general enough to serve my present purposes.

In the second argument, Irvin notes that our moral and aesthetic choices are often in tension with one another and that with sufficient attention to the nature of everyday aesthetic experiences, we might be in a position to better harmonize these choices, to reduce the tension between them.[54] Note the contrast with the previous argument. In that line of thought, cultivating an appreciation of everyday aesthetic experiences is morally desirable in contrast to a specific alternative about which we make certain moral claims. The presumption of moral benefit thus depends on other, contestable moral claims about the alternatives. This argument does not depend on any specific moral claims, but rather only the general claim that whatever we happen to think of as morally good, our aesthetic goals will notably come into conflict with our moral aims.

This argument is much more generally applicable than the former. Barring a theory of the (moral) good that proceeds *from* the aesthetic, it seems hard to contest that we will sometimes/often/always be put in a position to choose between an aesthetic good and a moral good. It is likewise difficult to see how one could argue against the claim that if we are not fully aware of even the presence of certain aesthetic goods (the quotidian aesthetic goods, in this case), then we will have trouble balancing those goods against the moral goods. So unlike the former argument, this latter argument for the moral importance of attention to everyday aesthetic

[54] *ibid.*, p. 43

experiences rests only on two formal (rather than substantive) moral claims: that aesthetic and moral goods will come into conflict and that lack of full conscious awareness of the presence of one kind of good undermines one's ability to freely choose between goods. It seems that no matter what the substance of one's moral views may be, these claims ought to meet with little resistance.

Saito

Yuriko Saito's argument for why we should care about everyday aesthetic experiences is that aesthetic experiences – including quotidian ones – have a profound effect on us, such that they influence our interaction with other kinds of value, which is enough to justify interest in them. "The power of the aesthetic to influence, and sometimes determine, our attitudes and actions has actually been recognized and utilized throughout history among the different cultural traditions."[55] She begins by observing that the power of the arts to influence has been noted as far back as Plato, else his advocacy of censorship makes no sense. Further, if we allow that the aesthetic is not limited to the arts, which seems undeniable at this point, then we must allow that everyday aesthetic considerations can, in theory, influence behavior as well.[56] Of course, even if we grant all this, it would still be consistent to allow that aesthetic considerations influence aesthetic attitudes and choices, but deny that such choices are of significance. Although it is self-evident that aesthetic experiences can influence aesthetic attitudes and aesthetically-relevant choices, Saito insists that this is of larger

[55] Saito, Yuriko. *Everyday Aesthetics*. Oxford: OUP, 2010. p. 55

[56] Saito seems to take it for granted that no one will make the move, faced with this, of arguing that the arts influence people based on their *artistic* merits rather than their *aesthetic* merits. We'll pass over this possibility in silence for now, as I think it's an untenable position.

significance given that our aesthetic choices may contribute to our substantive choices, as observed in the fact that "aesthetic considerations often influence our purchasing decisions."[57]

This line of approach seems intuitive enough – there's no *prima facie* reason to suppose that aesthetic values *wouldn't* have to be commensurated with other kinds of values. Even if we grant those who hold to the "disinteredness" tradition in aesthetics that judgments of aesthetic value must not take into account any other kind of value, it seems undeniable that at some point, those very disinterested judgments must be commensurated with non-aesthetic value judgments. This is the case even if we restrict our field of consideration to art, such as when deciding whether to spend money to buy a painting or, as in Gaugin's infamous example, choosing the life of a painter even at the expense of one's marriage.[58] Saito presses a specific example, however, to make her case, arguing that "our commonly held everyday aesthetic tastes and judgments regarding (1) natural creatures, (2) landscape, and (3) built environment and artifacts have often worked against, rather than in support of, environmental values."[59] Assuming that "environmental values" are not purely aesthetic – and they clearly are not – if Saito's argument here is convincing, it should more than adequately demonstrate the general point that non-art aesthetic

[57] *ibid.,* p. 56

[58] Again, there's at least logical space for an attempt to split aesthetic and artistic value here, saving the cases outlined on the basis of artistic value while denying that aesthetic value judgments, which presumably on this move apply primarily to non-art objects, either need to be commensurated with other kinds of value or have the power to overwhelm other kinds of value. Again, I don't think any such position can be defended, but I felt I should note that such a move is at least logically possible, lest I be accused of assuming too much.

[59] *ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

considerations can come into conflict with other kinds of values. Given some things we've already assumed for purposes of this dialectic, this gets us the conclusion that an account of everyday aesthetic experiences is important, inasmuch as our everyday aesthetic experiences can have serious, non-aesthetic ramifications.

I do find Saito's argument persuasive, but even if one did not find her particular case compelling, that serves at best only to indicate that her example does not speak to the interlocutor. I cannot think, offhand, of how one might go about a general argument that aesthetic values never conflict with non-aesthetic values in a (non-aesthetically) serious way. This only persuades me further that the claim is correct, but for our present purposes, it also suggests that we need not rehearse the specifics of Saito's argument, lest we get bogged down in what are, ultimately, irrelevant details. In order to proceed, we need only note Saito's core claim and smooth over a slight ambiguity therein.

The characterization I've given so far of Saito's argument is that aesthetic values come into conflict with non-aesthetic values, particularly outside the realm of art, which is reason enough to care about everyday aesthetic value (and thus about everyday aesthetic experience). Above, I quote Saito as claiming that in some cases, aesthetic values have "worked against" other concerns, which seems to indicate that she means to claim that they come into direct conflict with non-aesthetic values in the process of forming an all-things-considered judgment. It might be proposed, however, that this phrasing could indicate a more subtle kind of interaction – that aesthetic value judgments do not directly conflict with non-aesthetic value judgments so much

as influence how we perceive and act upon non-aesthetic values. I do not believe that it matters, however, which reading we choose, or if indeed we decline to choose between them at all, concluding that our aesthetic values interact with our non-aesthetic values in both ways.. For instance, Saito uses examples such as this to illustrate what she takes to be her core claim: "[i]f we are aesthetically attracted to certain creatures, we tend to care about their fate and are inclined to protect them, while we tend to remain indifferent toward those creatures we do not find aesthetically appealing."[60] Now, this reads not as a point about aesthetic values coming into *conflict* with moral values so much as one about how our aesthetic experiences can direct our attention, thus preventing us from engaging morally with certain things to the extent that we ought. But it does not matter whether this is a clarification of her other comments or a comment on a separate phenomenon (indicating that sometimes aesthetic values conflict directly with other values and sometimes they merely direct our attention). Either the claim that aesthetic values sometimes conflict with other kinds of value (such as moral) *or* the claim that aesthetic experiences direct our attention in such a way that our ability to activate other value-judgment modules is influenced constitutes sufficient reason to care about getting a proper account of aesthetic experience. Thus, I don't see this slight ambiguity in Saito's line of argument as a problem.

[60] *ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

Scruton

Both Saito and Irvin advance moral arguments as to why we should care about everyday aesthetic experience.[61] Between them, they offer persuasive reasons to accept that (a) our aesthetic values sometimes conflict with our moral values (*inter alia*) and (b) our aesthetic sensibilities can affect our perception and thus non-aesthetic (including moral) evaluations of quotidian experiences. As I noted in the last section, either of these claims would constitute sufficient *moral* reason to care about everyday aesthetic experience. Further, both claims are *formal* moral reasons to care about quotidian aesthetic experience, not tied to substantive moral claims. As long as you think that there are *any* binding moral claims, then, given only some widely-acceptable presumptions about the nature of value claims in general, these arguments have bite to them. As such, these arguments are quite broadly useful, their force being felt across a wide range of views.

That said, I am not quite satisfied in resting the case for caring about everyday aesthetic experience on these arguments.[62] Though I have no objections to these arguments *per se*, they seem to me to miss something about the importance of our aesthetic experience, about the role that aesthetic value choices play in our lives. Basing an argument about why we should care about our routine aesthetic experiences on, ultimately, moral concerns makes those experiences seem, in the words of Roger Scruton, "like a mere residue — something left over after the real

[61] As noted, Irvin actually offers several reasons to care about everyday experience, some non-moral, but devotes most of her attention to the moral arguments.
[62] As previously noted, I intend to revisit Irvin's comments about "deserving better" than to have our aesthetic interests dismissed peremptorily.

decisions have been made…"[63] In the pages following the passage from which that quote is drawn, Scruton offers a very different argument for taking an interest in the aesthetic of the everyday, one that seems to treat the aesthetic as a properly basic sphere of human interest. I agree with Scruton that our interest in quotidian aesthetic experience should not be supposed to rest on a prior interest in moral choices. However, as I disagree with him on what *does* ground our interest in such experience, I feel obligated to explain his position before I give my own.

Scruton's argument is that aesthetic choices in everyday contexts serve the purpose of "closing redundancies," by which he means they serve as a basis for choosing between options that are equally functional.[64] Or, as he says about Wittgenstein's door-framer, "[w]hen questions of function and utility have been answered, what interest is there left for a carpenter to address, other than our interest in the way things look?"[65] Now, this simple phrasing of the matter makes it seem as if everyday aesthetic experiences just *are* the sort of "residue" that Scruton would rather not have them turn out to be. Scruton, however, goes on to note that such judgments are not simply private decisions: "[o]thers too will look at and be either pleased or displeased with its proportions… and the less practical their involvement, the greater that interest [in the doorframe's appearance] will be."[66] Scruton dubs this a kind of "coordination problem"[67] which he takes to be solvable by (at least) attempts to reach a consensus about how the doorframe (to continue the example) *should* look.

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[63] Scruton, Roger. "In Search of the Aesthetic." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 47:3 (2007). p.240.
[64] *ibid.*, pp. 242-3.
[65] *ibid.*, p. 242.
[66] op. cit.
[67] op. cit.

Whether or not this consensus-building develops and employs an explicit critical vocabulary or the participants simply converge on popular solutions through trial and error, "a kind of rational discourse emerges, the goal of which is to build a shared environment in which we can all be at home, and which satisfies our need that things look right to everyone."[68] This discourse marks out, Scruton suggests, a "genuine realm of rational life," one worthy of philosophical attention. [69]

Scruton goes on to argue that our aesthetic experiences – either of art or everyday things – are important to us because they have meaning for us, but it is not necessary to the present dialectic to engage with that claim. We have enough to work with already – Scruton asserts that we, as humans, are routinely engaged in rational discourse in order to reach consensus about our aesthetic judgments. That humankind universally engages in a particular kind of rational discourse about something certainly seems to be a reason to direct philosophical attention toward the subject in question. Indeed, it is the rational discourse that seems to make the difference here; had we observed that humans simply *prefer* certain appearances to others that would be reason to direct perhaps *psychological* attention, but not necessarily philosophical scrutiny, except in an indirect fashion. It's not simply the fact that we care about "appearances" (speaking very broadly), or even that those appearances direct our attention and our choices, that makes aesthetic experience philosophically significant *in its own right* (as opposed to being one of the variables in, say, a moral problem). Scruton claims that it is, rather, the normative discourse about our human

[68] *ibid.*, p. 244.
[69] op. cit.

preoccupation with appearances that draws it into the ambit of philosophy as a distinct subject of interest.

We saw a glimpse of this line of thinking in Irvin's comment (cited earlier) that "[w]e deserve better than to have our ordinary pleasures, the ones which animate our day-to-day existence, dismissed as insignificant, and our ability to appreciate them accordingly diminished."[70] While we might reasonably infer from this that Irvin holds these ordinary pleasures as the proper subject of discourse, it is the fact that they are the proper subject of *normative* discourse that, per Scruton, makes them philosophically interesting. It is in this that Scruton's view appears to diverge from Irvin's and Saito's. This is an interesting view, though one I ultimately reject, for reasons that will be discussed in the next section.

The Importance of Critical Discourse

Scruton is not alone in thinking that quotidian aesthetic experiences are only philosophically interesting inasmuch as they are properly subjects of normative discourse. This is also the view of Christopher Dowling, who is at pains to distinguish aesthetic experiences from merely agreeable experiences, to use the Kantian analysis.[71] On such an analysis, there is a distinction to be made between judgments "grounded in subjective pleasure" that are taken to be based on "private feeling" and those that have (or are taken to have) normative force, "demand[ing] a similar response from others."[72] Dowling concedes that even the former judgments of

[70] *op. cit.*, again referencing comments in this vein by Shusterman.
[71] Dowling, Christopher. "The Aesthetics of Daily Life." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 50:3 (2010). p. 228.
[72] op. cit.

"agreeableness" technically could be called "aesthetic," even under a strictly Kantian paradigm, but argues that judgments of agreeableness are essentially "idiosyncratic and a-critical," and thus of limited, if any, interest.[73] Although Dowling worries that Irvin equivocates as to whether the everyday aesthetic experiences she discusses are genuinely aesthetic (as he takes it) or simply agreeable,[74] he goes on to insist that Irvin – and Saito, as we'll come to shortly – are in fact committed to an interest in aesthetic judgments that are properly the subject of normative aesthetic discourse, rather than purely a-critical responses.[75] In this section, we'll first examine his reasons for thinking that Irvin and Saito are so committed, then press the issue of whether such a commitment is actually necessary to make quotidian aesthetic experience philosophically interesting.

Dowling's reasons for thinking that Irvin is committed to this point are sketchy at best. No explicit declaration, of the form "*x* assertion of Irvin's is why she is committed to this view" is ever made, and the entirety of his comments on the matter are restricted to one paragraph.[76] He first notes that Irvin, herself, takes notice of the fact that Dewey's criteria of *unity* and *closure* are important inasmuch as they mark out "a clearly delimited entity,"[77] a necessary prerequisite to "secure the potential objectivity of aesthetic judgments."[78] He then goes on to observe that in a different paper, Irvin exhibited concern as to whether a particular sort of everyday (and

[73] *ibid*. pp. 228-9.
[74] *ibid.*, p. 228.
[75] *ibid.* p. 239.
[76] op. cit.
[77] op. cit.
[78] Irvin, "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience." p. 37.

putatively aesthetic) experience could be regarded as having a proper object.[79] These two observations essentially exhaust Dowling's explanation for why Irvin is committed to the view that everyday aesthetic experiences must be amenable to normative discourse. Lacking any definitive statement as to why these, taken together, should lead us to his conclusion, I am forced to conclude that Dowling is under the impression that the *only* reason why anyone should want to establish that certain kinds of nebulous, quotidian (and putatively aesthetic) experiences do, in fact, have discernible objects is because one wishes to vouchsafe their eligibility as subjects of normative discourse.[80]

Obviously, there is a great deal lacking in this argument (to use the term expansively). To begin with, Dowling is mistaken in assuming that Irvin's concern with establishing that the experience of an itch does, in fact, provide a proper object was to establish that it is likewise a proper subject of normative discourse. It is true that Irvin mentions in the course of the discussion under consideration that "[c]ontemporary normative accounts of aesthetic appreciation often carry an implicit or explicit requirement that some object independent of one's experience be grasped,"[81] but Dowling ignores the fact that Irvin is not *exclusively* pre-occupied with such accounts. Her primary concern, rather, appears to be to show that the experience of an itch can be felicitously described as aesthetic under any account of aesthetic experience that

[79] Irvin, Sherri. "Scratching an Itch." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 66:1 (2008). pp. 28-9. Cited by Dowling, p. 239.
[80] Despite the fact that Dowling notes Irvin's comment that she is not interested in "secur[ing] the objectivity of aesthetic judgments." (*op. cit.*, citing Irvin, "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience," p. 39.)
[81] Irvin, "Scratching an Itch." p. 28.

requires an object to "anchor" the experience, which, as Irvin says, "is common in accounts of aesthetic experience and appreciation."[82] This could not be more clearly stated than in her conclusion to the section in which this discussion occurs: "Should it be thought, then, that there must be a distinction between appreciative experience and that which is appreciated, there are good prospects of securing such a distinction even in the case of basic somatic phenomena like itches."[83] Irvin expresses no opinion at all in this section as to whether normative or non-normative accounts are to be preferred, and the fact that her argument works equally well for either sort of account (so long as the account requires that there be an object to aesthetic experiences) puts paid to Dowling's (unstated) assumption that the purpose of making such an argument is to ensure that aesthetic experiences are proper subjects of normative discourse.

Dowling's analysis of Irvin fails in another way, however – one that is particularly informative for our present purposes. He has either missed or chosen to ignore the fact that while Irvin is aware of the putative importance of unity and closure for aesthetic experiences, she ultimately rejects these as important criteria. Dowling *does* note that "[w]hile many of her examples lack these features, she dismisses the concern…"[84], but it is impossible to make sense of this comment of his without concluding that he does not recognize the importance (or perhaps even the substance) of Irvin's conclusion on this matter – at least, if he takes Irvin to be committed to the position he imputes to her. Irvin rejects unity and closure "even in the weak sense as

[82] op. cit.
[83] *ibid.*, p. 29.
[84] Dowling, p. 239.

conditions for an experience to count as aesthetic,"[85] *because* she is not concerned with securing the objectivity of aesthetic judgments, as she states explicitly, or, I take it from the discussion that follows, even the shareability of them. Irvin notably does not make this claim, and Dowling might be forgiven for thinking that the omission was made advisedly, but I believe that the comments following the claim support my reading.

Irvin first notes that while a correct aesthetic experience of a piece of music might only be possible after one has listened to it all the way through at least once ("…a particular passage might seem soothing and peaceful during an initial listen, but come to seem foreboding once its relation to subsequent passages is known."), it seems reasonable to think that one is nonetheless having *some* aesthetic experiences even as one hears the piece the first time. If our judgments are in flux, it is due to the fact that our aesthetic experiences are not based on discrete objects but a "continually shifting" frame of experience.[86] This much explains her comment that she does not aim to secure the objectivity of aesthetic judgments – clearly, one can have aesthetic experiences that are based on momentary, incomplete impressions, which can only serve as the basis for aesthetic judgments that are knee-jerk rather than considered, idiosyncratic rather than objective, which – in Irvin's opinion – does not make them less aesthetic for all that.

But I take it that she is not concerned even with asserting that aesthetic experiences are even necessarily of a nature as to be open to criticism, objective or

[85] Irvin, "The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience." p. 39.
[86] op. cit.

otherwise.in light of the next example. “I am petting the cat, I lower my face to his fur and enjoy the smell, period. End of story.”[87] Irvin rightly asserts that there is no “connoisseurship or sophistication” with respect to this experience. “I do not go on to position the cat’s smell in a careful taxonomy of scents… or… create a fashionable new scent, *Eau de chat*, in which I capture a selection of the scents the cat emits and place them in some relation to one another.”[88] This is not, however, because there is no complexity to be found in the smell of a cat’s fur – Irvin takes care to make these points in support of the claim that “actual placement of elements within a complex structure is not necessary for the elements to be considered aesthetically.”[89] Irvin is ultimately not concerned with whether the objects of experience in these cases are actually simple or complex, though. While her next example is of a monochrome painting, which is *in fact* simple, she allows that “the appearance of simplicity may be a figment of the way I have described the examples.”[90] Returning to the example of smelling her cat’s fur, Irvin asserts that her experience has many discrete and “subtle” components, and further asserts that if she is “alive to all these elements… what I grasp may *in fact* be quite complex.”[91] The thrust of all this is that Irvin doesn’t think it matters, ultimately, whether we characterize these experiences as simple or complex – it’s still clear, she claims, that they are aesthetic in nature.

The pertinent element of this, relative to Dowling’s characterization of Irving’s argument, is the claim that “actual placement of elements within a complex structure

[87] op. cit.
[88] *ibid.*, p. 40.
[89] op. cit.
[90] op. cit.
[91] *op. cit.* Emphasis mine.

is not necessary for the elements to be considered aesthetically." If Irving is arguing that the question of whether or not the experiences are aesthetic in nature does not turn on whether they are complex, then it cannot be the case that she is committed to aesthetic experiences having some sort of complex structure upon which one could rest critical discourse. Without a structure of some sort to the experience in question, it seems the only real comments that could be made about a given reaction to them would be "I get it" or "I don't get it." Hardly the sort of "critical discourse" Dowling is talking about! Irvin even allowing for the possibility that aesthetic experiences could be simple (or even apparently simple) while still being *aesthetic* in nature certainly means that Dowling cannot reasonably claim that Irvin is committed to the notion that aesthetic experiences must be proper subjects of normative discourse.[92]

Dowling's claims that Saito is committed to such a position are likewise shaky. He asserts that Saito is "committed to holding that certain of our everyday aesthetic assertions *must* carry some claim to 'responsible criticism and discourse' given that she holds that many of these, having environmental ramifications, should be the subject of critical scrutiny."[93] Note the condition on which the conclusion is based; to wit, "having environmental ramifications." The subject of the chapter in Saito's *Everyday Aesthetics* that Dowling relies on here is the *non-aesthetic* consequences of our quotidian aesthetic judgments. In other words, Saito's argument – or at least the part of it that

[92] I recognize that a great deal of my reading of this rests on what might be interpreted as a "throw-away" comment, made after the main point of the discussion at hand – "that experiences of the sort I have described [do not] fail a complexity test that must be passed if something is to count as an object of aesthetic attention" (*ibid*., p. 40) – had already been established. That said, I think it is a fair enough interpretation of Irvin's statements and, in any case, Dowling's claim to Irvin's being committed to his view has already been undermined.

[93] Dowling, p. 239. He cites chapter 2 of Saito's *Everyday Aesthetics* in support of this claim.

Dowling references here – is that our everyday aesthetic responses "should be the subject of critical scrutiny," in Dowling's words, for non-aesthetic reasons. Dowling does not take the time to clarify this point, but he should have, because it makes his argument a non-sequitur, as we will see.

Dowling's claim is that Saito and Irvin, as noted above, are committed to normative aesthetic discourse, and his claim is specifically about *aesthetic* norms, as illustrated here:

> "When characterizing *aesthetic* responses to daily life should we insist, as Kant does, not only on a distinction between judgments that lay claim to the agreement of everyone and those that merely report subjective pleasures but also upon the particular theoretical interest in judgments of the first kind? I think so – and while there is not space to develop this approach here, it will suffice to recognize the extent to which [Saito and Irvin] seem committed to an interest in precisely such judgments."[94]

It could not be more clear that Dowling is arguing that Saito and Irvin are committed to the existence of normative discourse specifically regarding our aesthetic responses to everyday life. That, however, is not at all what Saito was talking about in the chapter Dowling references. In an effort to demonstrate that we ought pay attention to our quotidian aesthetic experiences, she argues that these responses *have non-aesthetic consequences*. To take just one of many passages that show her focus, here, she notes that "[t]he history of American landscape aesthetics, though decidedly not developed to nurture ecological sensibility, does illustrate that our aesthetic taste can be guided to serve a specific social agenda."[95] In arguing that there is a link between our aesthetic values and our social values, Saito also draws a clear distinction

[94] *ibid.*, pp.238-9. Emphasis mine.
[95] Saito, Everyday Aesthetics, p. 72

between them; we can evaluate aesthetic responses from the standpoint of their practical value (or disvalue, to draw nearer to Saito's running theme). The only sense in which Saito argues that everyday aesthetic experiences should be subject to 'responsible criticism and discourse' – in this chapter, at least – is from non-aesthetic perspectives. This should not be surprising – as we've seen, Irvin, Saito, and Scruton all offer some variation on the argument that everyday aesthetic experiences are important inasmuch (though not necessarily *only* inasmuch) as they may have some moral or practical impact.

This is, of course, not at all in conflict with Saito's "anything goes" approach to everyday aesthetics.[96] One could assert that there are no aesthetic responses to everyday experiences that are *aesthetically* incorrect while still maintaining that some might tend to produce morally or socially undesirable results. Dowling's claim that Saito is committed to *aesthetic* norms for everyday experiences is not entailed by her commitment to criticism and discourse about everyday aesthetic experiences so long as said criticism and discourse is non-aesthetic, which is all that Saito argues for in the chapter to which Dowling is referring. As Dowling offers no other reason to think Saito is so committed, we must conclude that his argument fails.

So much for Dowling's arguments that Irvin and Saito are committed to an interest in aesthetic normative discourse about everyday aesthetic experience (and thus to norms governing such quotidian experiences). Beyond his (mistaken) claim that Irvin and Saito are committed to such a position, he offers no substantial argument for

[96] To use Dowling's characterization (Dowling, p. 238).

insisting on it. He thinks it "significant" that Kant distinguished between norm-governed aesthetic responses and purely subjective or "pleasurable" aesthetic responses, but his assertion that "[i]f… aesthetic talk in this domain includes the mere evincing of subjective responses… we are in danger of losing… focus on those responses that legitimately engage critical attention…"[97] baldly begs the question. Saito openly desires to draw focus *away* from the latter responses, at least as traditionally understood, and Irvin is arguably uninterested in them when it comes to quotidian aesthetic experiences, so both could simply affirm the antecedent and be done with the matter. Statements such as "[o]n such a view [i.e., Saito's and/or Irvin's] I find myself left wondering what all the fuss has been about"[98] do not so much address Saito and Irvin as talk past them, as neither Saito or Irvin seem interested in "all the fuss" about normative aesthetic discourse in this realm.

That said, neither Saito nor Irvin seems to do much to address the question of *why* it is we ought eschew the kind of normative discourse that attaches to talk about art when considering everyday aesthetic experiences. In essence, Saito and Irvin seem to simply assert that we need not be interested in normative aesthetic discourse about everyday aesthetic experiences, [99] while Dowling asserts that we should. Scruton seems to agree with Dowling, inasmuch as he posits that it is this discourse that

[97] *ibid.*, p. 229. Although I have elided several parts of the sentence, I believe having done so draws attention to the banality of the observation, rather than obscuring Dowling's intent.
[98] *ibid.*, pp. 229-30.
[99] The operative word here being, of course, "need." To claim that *some* everyday aesthetic experiences are not subject to normative discourse is not to say that *none* of them are, but that *any* of them are not subject to such discourse is enough to drive a wedge between the Saito/Irvin position and the Dowling/Scruton position, which asserts that the very thing that is interesting about aesthetic discourse is the normative aspect.

vouchsafes philosophical interest in such experiences. If Dowling can be rebuked for begging the question against Saito and Irvin, it seems that Saito and Irvin don't speak to Dowling and Scruton (which is not surprising, as they weren't trying to), inasmuch as no one on either side of the debate has offered a coherent sustained defense of his or her position, even if Scruton and Saito have offered us the beginnings of such defenses. Let us therefore see if we can construct explicit arguments for and against such norms in the realm of everyday aesthetic experience.

Scruton takes it as a given that we will have discourse about everyday aesthetic experiences. Regarding the door of our example, he says "…all will have an interest in the way the door looks: and the less practical their involvement, the greater that interest will be."[100] Leaving aside the unwonted assertion that aesthetic interest is necessarily inversely proportional to practical interest (as one could be uninterested in something on both practical and aesthetic levels), he proposes that the solution to the "coordination problem" that naturally arises from this proliferation of interest is rational discourse in which we "strive for agreement."[101]

Earlier, I moved quickly and without elaboration from Scruton's mention of rational discourse to the assumption that Scruton was in fact talking about rational and *normative* discourse on the matter at hand – this is a felicitous opportunity to ground that move. Scruton does not *explicitly* call this discourse normative, but I think normative discourse is the inescapable consequence of how he tells the story that (eventually) leads to the fine arts. He characterizes this rational discourse as "a kind of

[100] Scruton, "In Search of the Aesthetic." p. 243.
[101] *ibid*., pp. 243-4.

reasoned dialogue, the goal of which is to secure some measure of agreement in judgments…"[102] He later notes that "aesthetic values are important" and that "we are always striving for agreement over them…."[103] Further, in *Art and Imagination*, he says that "aesthetic attitudes are normative: that is, they involve a strong sense of their own 'correctness' or appropriateness to an object."[104] He also explicitly claims that "criticism is a normative science" and that "aesthetic appreciation" has a "normative quality."[105] It is difficult for me to conceive of how discourse that fits with these claims could be anything but normative. It is, I suppose, possible to conceive of a kind of rational discourse on such matters that consists of the various observers relating which features figured into their own aesthetic experiences such that the participants are able to identify the features toward which they can direct their attention so as to achieve an already-agreed-upon, most-desirable aesthetic experience – a purely advisory discourse, in other words. Such a model could only exclude normative talk, however, if we assume that all the participants had a common aesthetic value-set, and there's no reason to suppose this is always or even usually the case. I believe we can conclude that Scruton's "rational discourse" is normative discourse.

As previously noted, it is this rational, normative discourse that Scruton considers philosophically interesting[106]; the reason *why* constitutes the closest thing Scruton and Dowling have for an argument against Saito's "anything goes" position (as

[102] *ibid.*, p. 244.
[103] *ibid.*, p. 245.
[104] Art and Imagination, pp. 138-9.
[105] *ibid.*, p. 139.
[106] Scruton, "In Search of the Aesthetic," p. 244.

Dowling calls it).[107] The best indication of the reasoning behind this claim comes from Scruton's assumption that the "coordination problem" of shared quotidian aesthetic experience is resolved by coming to agreement among the parties. Now, Scruton never explicitly claims that the ultimate goal of discourse about everyday aesthetic experience is to sort responses into "better" and "worse" responses – to define some standard of taste, if you will, for quotidian aesthetics – but the insistent presence of the normative aspect of this discourse leaves little room for any other conclusion. Scruton's assertion that this discourse is the philosophically interesting aspect of this area of investigation and Dowling's dismissal of "a-critical" responses lends support to the supposition that their position is, roughly, that discourse about everyday aesthetic experience must be normative, because the only conceivable problem to be resolved is the problem of agreement. That is, if there is no problem to be resolved, then what we have regarding quotidian aesthetic experience is not so much discourse as commentary (and such commentary is presumably not philosophically interesting).

I won't challenge the presumption that mere commentary would not elicit philosophical interest, but not only is there room to challenge Scruton's assumption that the problem of everyday aesthetic experience is one of agreement, the elements from which we may explicitly construct such a challenge are already found in Irvin's and Saito's work. The claim that quotidian aesthetic experiences do not exhibit closure and unity in the same way as experiences of art, when fleshed out, not only calls into question the preoccupation with normativity Scruton and Dowling suppose must exist

[107] Dowling, "The Aesthetics of Daily Life," p. 231.

in order to make aesthetic discourse philosophically interesting. Likewise, the claim is the first stepin articulating just what sort of philosophically interesting discourse we might, in fact, have about them.

Saito makes the uncontroversial point that we "ignore or suspend from our experience" of artworks many things that nonetheless present themselves when considering the work but which are not a 'proper' part of it – "[f]or example, a symphony is to be appreciated through *its* sound only, disregarding the traffic noise outside the symphony hall, the coughing of the audience..." and so on[108] – in the service of the (apparently) more controversial point that we have no compelling reason to similarly bracket out our experiences of weather (to take the particular quotidian phenomena under discussion in the essay I'm referencing)[109], a point neatly summed up thusly: "…weather as an aesthetic object is not something neatly confined into a package."[110] In other words, insofar as we can have aesthetic experiences of everyday things, we have aesthetic experiences of everyday things generally speaking, not of just certain kinds of everyday objects or everyday objects that fall under a certain rubric. This situation makes it impossible to articulate a set of standards of what we must and must not consider in formulating our aesthetic experiences. What do I bracket out of my experiences of the weather? Of petting the cat? It seems obvious that one single standard could not rule in both cases, but if that's so, the set of norms needed proliferates. Since we clearly do not carry around a massive

[108] Saito, Yuriko. "The Aesthetics of Weather," *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith, eds. CUP: New York, 2005. p. 158.
[109] *ibid.*, pp. 157-60.
[110] *ibid.*, p. 160.

compendium of aesthetic standards for every conceivable everyday object, then unless we reject the possibility that we *do* have aesthetic experiences of everyday things, we must conclude that many quotidian aesthetic experiences are free-form in the sense that they are of, well, no *particular* things at all. By this I mean not to imply that a given aesthetic experience has no particular object, but that there's no easily articulable set of things that serve as objects of aesthetic experiences, or neatly defined set of rules for having aesthetic experiences about any given thing.[111] Even if you and I are both having aesthetic experiences of the weather on the same day, at the same time, in roughly the same place, there's no guarantee that we are having aesthetic experiences of the same sets of features.

This explication of what's going on in quotidian aesthetic experience underwrites Saito's apparent insistence that there can be no normative discourse about such experiences. No such norms can exist because there's no specific, common object of evaluation between any two quotidian aesthetic experiences even when two subjects are having aesthetic experiences of the same general object (such as the weather, on a given day from a given location). If you and I are both contemplating a painting, the presumption that we can articulate norms that describe a "correct" aesthetic experience of the painting depends on being able to identify to what those norms apply – that is, on the "of the painting" clause. We can't articulate a set of norms about what it is to have a correct aesthetic experience of the weather, because, as noted above, there is no standard idea of what it means to have an aesthetic

[111] Obviously, one could reject this, and Scruton and Dowling may, but I am at present tracing the argument from the sympathetic point of view.

experience of the weather. Do we "…focus only on the visual appeal of the cumulus cloud, or concentrate on the sound of the raindrops hitting the roof"?[112] Again, as I suggested above, no norms exist for identifying the proper objects of quotidian aesthetic experience, which entails that no norms can exist for what it is to have a proper aesthetic experience of those – unspecifiable – objects. This is, in effect, a transcendental argument against normative discourse about everyday aesthetic experience. Saito's position does not simply argue that such normative discourse *does not* apply to quotidian aesthetic experience, it argues that it *cannot*.[113]

Now, this is of course a heady conclusion, and one that might strike some readers as implausibly strong, as it seems to imply that my aesthetic evaluations can never be *wrong*. Suppose you and I are looking out of the window, observing the weather, and I state that the weather today seems "peaceful" – it seems that if there is, in fact, a large tornado bearing down on us, that my observation is straightforwardly inapt.[114] This would appear to argue against the conclusion that we *cannot* engage in normative discourse about the weather. I think, however, that the example shows less than it would at first appear. It assumes that in observing "the weather," we are both considering the same things in the same context. Perhaps, unbeknownst to you

[112] Saito, "The Aesthetics of Weather," p. 158.
[113] Inasmuch as Saito begins her discussion by talking about the inadequacy of art-centered aesthetics for analyzing aesthetic experiences of everyday life, it seems to me that the discussion of the aesthetics of weather is meant to be merely an example of this inadequacy, and so I take it her points are, broadly speaking, intended to generalize. However, Saito – frustratingly – never explicitly says this. Nonetheless, I feel that the assumption is justified, especially given that she makes a very similar analysis of the Japanese tea ceremony as an object of aesthetic appreciation in *Everyday Aesthetics* (pp. 33-5), offering similar reasons to think that an art-centric aesthetic is inadequate to analyze the appreciation of said experience, this time specifically speaking of the tea ceremony as an example of an everyday experience not appropriately handled under traditional aesthetic paradigms.
[114] I am indebted to Sherri Irvin for this example.

(maybe I'm picking you up from the airport?) there were *several* tornados yesterday and so I regard today's weather as, relatively speaking, "peaceful." Perhaps I'm bracketing out the tornado itself and referring only to the uniform blanket of thick, grey clouds that obscure the sky. Perhaps I am simply perverse, and find the idea of mass destruction soothing.

These replies are offered somewhat playfully, of course, but I believe they illustrate Saito's point, which is that there are no formalized frameworks for evaluating quotidian aesthetic experiences as there are for evaluating artworks. Now, to be sure, there are informal customs that can be invoked with regard to certain kinds of everyday objects of aesthetic consideration. In considering the weather, for instance, it would be *unusual* to bracket out the single most dramatic phenomenon visible at the moment. However, it would not be *wrong* in the way that it would be wrong to consider the color of the wall upon which a painting is hung when evaluating the painting. While we undoubtedly carry with us sets of commonly used standards of aesthetic evaluation that can be applied to various everyday objects, even if the evaluation is purely private,[115] the point of the transcendental argument outlined just above is that such informally conventional norms are only straightforwardly applicable if the object of our consideration is such that it falls into an informally conventional category. As I am free, in quotidian aesthetic appreciation, to direct my appreciation toward anything I like, up to and including the most *outré* assemblages of things. Now, certainly once something has been picked out, apt or inapt things can be said, but it is

[115] A point usefully made by Irvin in "Aesthetics and the Private Realm," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* 67:2 (2009), pp. 229-30.

nonetheless impossible to say that any given quotidian aesthetic evaluation is *straightforwardly wrong*, because there is always the possibility of constructing a plausible context for the evaluation (a move denied us when making evaluations of artworks, as the type of work contrains the available contexts of evaluation). When we are permitted, as we are in appreciation of the everyday world, to specify the object of evaluation as well as its context in an *ad hoc* fashion, there are no evaluations that are *simply* right or wrong, only those that are more or less unusual, more or less interesting. Lacking any pre-established framework of evaluation for what is being considered, much less a conventional notion of *what* is being considered, in many cases, what critical discourse most likely to exist about everyday aesthetic experiences seems bound to be more pre-occupied with establishing what is being considered and how, rather than the correctness of any judgments rendered. This is especially true given that without any norms of consideration (on either objects or frameworks of judgment), there is nothing much to say, from the critical standpoint, about the choices any given individual might make regarding *what* to consider and *how* to consider it.

It might be noted, however, that I have moved from claiming that there can be no normative discourse about everyday aesthetics to claiming that any such discourse is inevitably relative to *ad hoc* paradigms of evaluation, which is of course not quite the same claim. I do not think this undermines the general point against Scruton and Dowling. Even if we allow that there can be some normative discourse about everyday aesthetic experiences, remember that for our interlocutors, what makes aesthetic

discourse philosophically interesting is the problem of agreement.[116] It is the fact that aesthetic discourse is focused on agreement, according to Scruton, that makes it evident that such discourse is normative. I do not agree – to the extent that there is normative discourse, discourse focused on agreement, about everyday aesthetic experiences, I think that it is vastly less important than discourse focused on uncovering the objects and contexts of evaluation. In other words, I do not think that the problem of agreement is what makes aesthetic discourse philosophically interesting; rather I think the salient issues are communication and coordination. Even if one were not inclined to agree with this claim, however, the fact that there are no norms to govern the selection of objects and paradigms seriously undermines the view that what is interesting about aesthetic discourse is obtaining *agreement*.

Scruton is right to note that others besides the door-framer will have an interest in the aesthetic qualities of the door-frame, but this does not immediately indicate that *agreement* is what the various parties are after. Consider – if I am interested only in the aesthetic comfort I take in my own home, why think that I am after agreement with *anyone*? Even in situations where more than one person is likely to have some interest in the aesthetic qualities of something, it would only follow that agreement was the interesting problem if they each had *equal rights* over the thing in question. Returning to our persistent example of the door-frame, it may well be that one person has the prerogative to decide what the frame *will* look like while everyone

[116] We've examined Scruton's explicit statements to this effect, but Dowling seems also to be most plausibly read this way, especially in light of his remark "I suggest… that one should also recognize that the 'aesthetic' judgements that are typically of interest in discussions of art are those possessing such a normative aspect such that judgers will (say) demand agreement from apparent dissenters." (p. 228)

else has only the prerogative to say what it *must not* look like. This is the situation in many scenarios regarding how one decorates one's private property that will be nonetheless visible to the public – the only norms that apply to your choices are negative, ruling out certain choices. Granted, we are not talking specifically about *aesthetic* norms in this case – most of these have moral or pragmatic justifications – but that only serves to underscore my point.

Why *would* we think that agreement is the relevant question in quotidian aesthetics, anyway? If you and I are both having an aesthetic experience of the weather, what might prompt us to think that we are interested in coming to a singular answer about the weather's aesthetic properties? Obviously, autonomy in this realm is also most conducive to personal aesthetic satisfaction, but since we are specifically concerned with demonstrating that there is philosophically interesting discourse to be had about quotidian aesthetic experience, that is not enough. Beyond personal satisfaction, however, discourse about our disparate experiences has the potential to be extremely productive – in terms of gaining understanding of each other, of discovering new ways to go about having aesthetic experiences, of expanding one's aesthetic sensibilities, and so on – and no more so than if we are free to have our own aesthetic experiences, in our own ways. Such discourse would naturally require some critical vocabulary, but this vocabulary would not be deployed in the service of securing agreement, only in service of making apparent to ourselves as well as others the aesthetic qualities of the experiences in question.

Now, it needs to be noted that this view does appear to generate friction with Irvin's comment that when she smells her cat's fur, she does not then carry out a careful analysis of the aesthetic experience in question. But this tension is only apparent. Irvin is correct that we need not deploy this analytic vocabulary when having quotidian aesthetic experiences, but neither do we *need* to deploy our critical vocabulary to have an aesthetic experience of art. Just as this fact does not in the latter case mean that we *cannot* engage in discourse about our experiences, it does not rule out discourse in the former case.

The only question that remains is whether this sort of discourse is philosophically interesting, but I believe the answer is pretty clearly affirmative. To begin with, coordination problems have traditionally been considered philosophically interesting. Indeed, the problem of how a large, diverse population with diverse aesthetic sensibilities can go about maximizing individual aesthetic pleasure *without* a uniform set of aesthetic norms seems to be a particularly interesting coordination problem. One might call it the "problem of pluralistic aesthetic autonomy"which would undoubtedly involve the question of what non-aesthetic norms would best serve such a purpose. If we believe it is likely that individuals both seek to maximize their own aesthetic pleasure *and* have differing aesthetic preferences, the appearance of such a problem seems inevitable. While this problem might not be of interest to any given philosopher, it's hard to see how one might maintain this is not a philosophically interesting problem as such.

Let us take stock. We've shown that Saito and Irvin are not, as Dowling insist, committed to an interest in normative discourse about everyday quotidian aesthetic experience, a point that Dowling hoped to make in service (as we shall shortly see) of his argument that art-centric aesthetic theories, complete with their preoccupation with normative discourse, could felicitously describe everyday aesthetic experiences. Saito, especially, was keen to resist this latter claim, for reasons made clear above in what I dubbed the transcendental argument against normative discourse about everyday aesthetic experience. Having dispensed with the necessary existence of normative discourse about everyday aesthetic experiences, it was left only to show that there was something of philosophical interest about them. The preceding paragraphs lay out what I take to be a convincing argument that there can be philosophically interesting discourse about quotidian aesthetic experience without the need for such discourse to be aesthetically normative in nature. This not only answers the question we initially set out to answer – why care about everyday aesthetic experience? – but also sets the stage (and, incidentally, tips our hand) for the answer to the antecedent question – is this work that can be done by existing (art-centric) accounts?

Why Not Analyze Quotidian Aesthetics under Existing Accounts?

Given the reasonability of taking philosophical interest in everyday aesthetics, for which we've argued in previous sections, we are left to ask whether we can accommodate this interest within existing aesthetic frameworks or not. In *Everyday*

Aesthetics, Yuriko Saito insists that we cannot,[117] a position that Dowling rejects.[118] Saito's argument and Dowling's treatment of it show different sides of the debate, though not, I think, the ones Dowling wanted to show, nor in the way he wished, as Dowling gets much wrong about Saito's argument. I will, however, deal first with Dowling's critique of what he takes Saito's argument to be, as it makes for a more convenient way of introducing the issues.

Dowling's ultimate aim in "The Aesthetics of Daily Life" is to clarify the substance of what he calls "the aesthetics of daily life intuition" (ADLI), which he takes to come in two forms, strong and weak, maintaining, respectively, that quotidian aesthetic experiences either cannot or can be accommodated under existing, art-centric aesthetic paradigms.[119] Dowling hopes to show that quotidian aesthetics is best dealt with in the already existing, art-centric paradigm. He takes it that Irvin is already on his side (that is, committed to Weak ADLI), at least in part because of her attempts to show that there is an object of aesthetic consideration even in such everyday experiences as scratching an itch.[120] As we've already established, though, Irvin was not, in advancing those arguments, up to what Dowling took her to be doing, so I don't think he can automatically count her in his corner on this argument. Regardless, Dowling is correct in calling Saito's arguments "perhaps the most developed exploration and defense of the aesthetics of daily life to date," so it makes sense for

[117] Notably in the chapter entitled "The Neglect of Everyday Aesthetics," pp. 10-53.
[118] Dowling, "Aesthetics of Daily Life," pp. 230-8.
[119] *ibid.*, p. 245. Dowling actually gives a slightly different, arguably stronger version of the Strong ADLI (Aesthetics of Daily Life Intuition), one that, taken on its face, leaves logical space between it and the Weak ADLI. In the interests of charity I only impute to him this slightly weaker version that leaves no such logical gap.
[120] *ibid.*, p. 230.

both him and us to focus more on engagement with her arguments. Dowling's approach to Saito's defense of the Strong ADLI is to refute Saito's arguments that everyday aesthetic objects are crucially different from art and then to establish that Saito is committed to a normative account of everyday aesthetics, or, in other words, to deny that discourse about everyday aesthetic experience could be non-normative.

Dowling *must* succeed at negating both points (that everyday aesthetic objects are crucially different from art *and* that discourse about everyday aesthetic experience could be non-normative) to achieve his dialectical goal. If it is the case that objects of everyday aesthetic experience are crucially different from art[121] it would argue that we need a separate analytic of quotidian aesthetics, regardless of whether or not that analytic was normative. Likewise, since normativity is a prominent and seemingly indispensable feature of discourse about art, if it is reasonable that discourse about everyday aesthetic experiences could be non-normative, that likewise suggests the need for a separate analytic.[122] That is, it's sufficient to stop Dowling's ultimate argument – that all we need to do is sufficiently expand art-centric aesthetics, rather than offer a new paradigm to deal with quotidian aesthetic experience – if either one of these proves to be the case.

Now, since we've already shown that at least some discourse about quotidian aesthetic experience is not normative, it seems we have no further need to examine Dowling's arguments. While that is true enough, it is instructive to note what Dowling was doing (or attempting to do, at least) in his argument against Saito, paying special

[121] Skirting for the moment the quagmire of cashing out "crucially" in this sentence.
[122] In what is arguably a special case of "being crucially different" from art-centric aesthetics.

attention to how his dialectic goes awry. On my reading, Dowling mistakes a step in the dialectical process for reasons supporting Saito's conclusion, so that when he refutes those "reasons," he takes himself to have undermined her conclusion, when in fact he has done nothing of the sort. It bears noting right away that Saito does not, in *Everyday Aesthetics*, make a transcendental argument against normative discourse about everyday aesthetics of the kind I advanced earlier. Although I believe that the argument is available to Saito and indeed even implicit in some of her other work, she never makes such an argument explicit anywhere that I have seen. It would be unfair, then, to take Dowling to task for missing *that* argument – that is not, however, what I am doing. Rather, whereas Dowling focuses on the ways in which Saito suggests everyday aesthetic experiences are distinct from experiences of art, apparently in the belief that Saito is after an argument to prove that the objects of everyday aesthetic experience are crucially different from art, Saito is making a different point altogether, which is that the broader nature of art, rather than any specific characteristics of common art-forms, blocks the usefulness of any attempt to expand art-centered aesthetics to deal with everyday aesthetic experience.

Saito offers seven characteristics of what she calls "paradigmatic art" that are, generally speaking, alien to the objects of everyday aesthetic experience[123]; Dowling condenses these down to three broad points and refutes them, essentially arguing that the differences are not so great as Saito seems to think.[124] Having done this, Dowling takes himself to have undermined Saito's claim of crucial difference. This, however,

[123] Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, pp. 18-28.
[124] Dowling, pp. 230-8. The specifics of Dowling's critique are not germane, as we shall shortly see.

utterly misses that these were never the fundamental reason for thinking there is a crucial difference between art and the everyday; there were, dialectically, only Saito's opening move – a stage-setting gesture, if you will.. Saito goes on to note that the art-forms traditionally considered paradigmatic no longer set the limits of art-centric aesthetics. "However, of course there are a number of newer forms of art which are meant to break out of the confinement posed by all these conventional characteristics. Environmental art, happenings, performance, chance music, installation, conceptual art, and interactive art immediately come to mind."[125] She examines three examples, each of which "questions the assumptions underlying the art-centered aesthetic that I have been discussing" yet concludes that "even with a more inclusive view concerning art, art-centered aesthetics still does not provide an adequate account of every aspect of our aesthetic life." [126] Specifically, she concludes that "even with this updated and revised scope… [a]s long as art is conceived as something different from our daily affairs, *even if* it is meant to illuminate or emulate some aspects of our everyday life, it has already acquired a special status, not shared by our everyday life itself."[127] She expands on this later with the comment "[a]rt, whatever its designation, no matter how inclusive that notion becomes, and even when its intent is to blur the distinction from life, is necessarily characterized as an *exception to* or *commentary on* everyday objects and affairs."[128]

[125] Saito, Everyday Aesthetics, p. 28.
[126] *ibid.*, p. 29.
[127] *ibid.*, p. 35.
[128] *ibid.*, pp. 40-1.

Regardless of whether we agree with Saito's conclusion that to sufficiently expand art-centered aesthetics to take in everyday aesthetic experience is tantamount to the "obliteration of the concept of art," as she titles the section immediately following the final quote given above,[129] it is perfectly obvious that Saito was never relying on any specific distinctions between paradigmatic art-forms and the objects of everyday aesthetic experience to ground her claim that the two are crucially different. Laying out those distinctions was a step in the dialectic, followed by showing that there are art-forms that themselves blur the supposed distinctions, followed then by Saito's true reason for insisting that art-centric aesthetics cannot accommodate quotidian aesthetic experience – that analysis under the rubric of art necessarily renders the experience special, or decidedly non-quotidian. Dowling doesn't address this conclusion at all, rendering his argument moot.

As to whether Saito is correct, I am inclined to think so, but I also do not believe that we need broach the issue, since I find the transcendental argument against the normativity of discourse about everyday aesthetics, which proposes that normative discourse about aesthetics vanishes or diminishes in importance when considering quotidian aesthetic experience because the objects and contexts of evaluation are specified *ad hoc*, convincing enough evidence that the analysis of everyday aesthetic experience cannot be carried out in a traditional, art-centric framework. Were

[129] *ibid.*, p. 41.

someone to reject that argument, then Saito's "ordinariness argument" would again become salient and need to be addressed.[130]

Conclusion

This chapter has been devoted to clearing the ground for my account of aesthetic experience. Specifically, I set out to answer the following questions: what is meant by "aesthetic experience"; why is it the sort of thing we ought to care about enough that a philosophical analysis of it is needed; and why insist that an account of aesthetic experience be able to underwrite an aesthetic of the everyday? In answering the first, I set out to clarify my conception of experience. In answering the second, I drew heavily on the work of Sherri Irvin and Yuriko Saito. In answering the third, I relied on an argument I find implicit in Saito's work. I am satisfied that all three of these questions have been answered sufficiently to show that we ought to want an account of aesthetic experience and want one that can also handle everyday aesthetic experiences (in other words, a non-art-centric account). I believe that we only satisfy the second desideratum by developing a formal account that does not lean heavily on appeal to intuitions about experiences of art for its philosophical fodder, but before I can get to developing my own account (which you'll see in Chapter Four), we must first map out the philosophical space within aesthetics for such an account. I am not the first to offer an account of aesthetic experience and numerous other accounts have

[130] It should be mentioned at this point that Kevin Melchionne has offered his own brief against Dowling's conclusions, in "Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life: A Reply to Dowling," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 51:4 (2011), pp. 437-442. While I agree with much of what Melchionne says, his arguments appear to be entirely orthogonal to my own, as I have tried and failed several times to find a way to gracefully mention them in the course of developing my own line of reply.

come to grief. It would not do to repeat the mistakes of the past, so the next two chapters will be devoted to preventing just such a blunder. Chapter Two examines George Dickie's justly famous refutation of the very idea of offering an account of aesthetic experience and shows that there are, in fact, plausible grounds for such a project, Dickie's critiques notwithstanding. Chapter Three, then, critiques post-Dickie accounts, making the case for a new account, which I will then offer.

Chapter Two

This chapter will be devoted to dealing with two prominent critiques of the notion of aesthetic experience. The discussion of these critiques, offered by George Dickie and Noël Carroll, will be framed in terms of their criticisms of the aestheticist project to define art in terms of aesthetic experience. It is not my primary aim to provide a definition of art but rather to provide a plausible account of aesthetic experience. That said, I hope to provide an account that will be at a minimum congenial to an aesthetic analysis of art, and – given that much of the discussion of aesthetic experience has been in the context of providing a definition of art – it suits the purpose of addressing some of the traditional objections against accounts of aesthetic experience (the subject of this thesis) to discuss what appear to be objections against aestheticism (which is not, strictly speaking, the subject of this thesis). I assure the reader I mean no misdirection here. In explaining their objections to aestheticism, Dickie and Carroll make potent arguments against contemporary accounts of aesthetic experience. Dickie's objections, in particular, restricted the logical space available for such accounts and gave many aestheticians reason to feel that the whole notion of aesthetic experience should be abandoned as a fruitless subject of enquiry. In this chapter I will argue that while their criticisms should be taken seriously and must shape any future account of aesthetic experience, they do not, in fact, give sufficient reason to abandon the project entirely, thus clearing the way for a discussion of the current accounts and, ultimately, my own analysis.

A Brief Introduction to Aestheticism

Aesthetic reductionism (or, more simply, aestheticism) is the position that we can define "art" in terms of aesthetic experiences. Common formulations include: art objects are things intended to provide aesthetic experiences; art objects are things primarily intended to provide aesthetic experiences; art objects are things that most aptly provide aesthetic experience; and so on. In all variations, however, aestheticism entails that our experiences of art *qua* art can be understood as special cases of aesthetic experience more generally; thus all forms of aestheticism require an account of aesthetic experience to be truly complete. Now, there's a lot going on here, so let's unpack a few things before we move forward.

To begin, let's think about what it means to experience art *qua* art. We can observe that there are all sorts of ways to engage with art, some of which seem to be about something other than "the art" itself. That is, most of us would intuitively conclude that someone regarding a beautiful painting only to appraise its market value is not really engaging directly with the work as such, much in the same way we might conclude that someone regarding a sports car only to evaluate its usefulness for target practice is not engaging with the object on the aesthetically appropriate terms. I realize we've been using all sorts of loose talk about "appropriate" terms and so forth, and we will deal with those vagaries in due time, but for the moment, I am hoping we can agree that there are ways of regarding or engaging with artifacts that are proper to those objects (broadly speaking) and those that are improper to them (likewise). For instance, it is proper (or more proper) to use scissors to cut something, like paper or

cloth, and less proper to use them, say, to hammer a nail. Even beyond the issue of practicality, there seems to be some *normativity* at work. Suppose the scissors are unusually hefty and designed, purely by chance, in such a way as to make them an excellent hammer – even in such a case there would be some sense that cutting is the more proper activity for these items, while hammering would be seen as in some way an improper use. The point of this imagining is to observe that scissors are "made for" cutting and therefore using them in some other way than for the kind of cutting in question is in some sense "wrong." Now, I don't wish to get sidetracked into a discussion of social normativity, nor even do I urge that this observation, generalized, be taken as given; rather, I merely enjoin the reader to allow that there is some intuitive appeal to the claim that for *many* kinds of things in the world there are proper and improper ways of interacting with them.

Further, we observe that there are not only different experiences (that is, the experiential tableau is differentiated rather than homogenous) but that there are different *kinds* of experiences. Some of the distinctions are broad – we distinguish sensuous experiences from intellectual ones, for instance. Others are more finely cut but still clear – both terrifying experiences and arousing experiences are emotional experiences, more broadly speaking, but it seems undeniable that they nonetheless constitute distinct categories of experience. Still others are almost trivially specifiable – I could distinguish truck-experiences from car-experiences by dint of (what I take to be) the primary objects of those experiences, if I cared enough to do so.

Returning to aestheticism, then, we see that it is committed to several subordinate claims. First, it is committed to the claim that aesthetic experience is a kind of experience that can be described adequately enough that we might accept it alongside other sorts of experiences, such as the arousing or the terrifying. Second, it is committed to casting aesthetic experience as a significant, rather than trivial, type of experience; that is, aesthetic experiences as a kind are important to humans, the sorts of things we seek out and that in some significant way structure our lives. Third, it is committed to the claim that art, as an artifactual kind, can be defined in terms of the provision of aesthetic experience.[131] As noted above, there are variations in various aestheticist accounts of how art is related to the provision of aesthetic experience, but the common claim is that art can be defined as something that provides aesthetic experiences in some particular manner (most aptly, intentionally, most vividly, etc.).

The claims are interrelated. The second claim is important to the third because if aesthetic experience is trivially specifiable, there would, presumably, be no value in the reduction. That is, if "aesthetic experiences" are not an interesting sort of experience, there would be no value to invoking them as the basis of our definition of art. After all, my romantic experiences are technically primate-experiences, since the objects of my romantic feelings and interactions – fellow humans – are all primates. In this regard, my romantic experiences can be lumped with my experiences of going to

[131] Some philosophers, perhaps of a Wittgenstenian bent, may be tempted at this point to object that such a project is futile because giving *any* definition of art is impossible. Even if I were intending to offer a definite account of aesthetic reduction – and I am not – I would not be prepared to engage this claim. I take as a starting point in the discussion that such definitions are possible, which is, one supposes, a permissible position to take, as it is far from a settled issue whether Wittgenstein's concerns about definitional projects really carry the force he (apparently) takes them to carry.

the zoo and looking at the gorillas – also experiences of fellow primates – but there's little to be gained in terms of understanding or appreciating romantic experiences by casting them in those terms. "Primate experiences" is just not a very interesting category for philosophical inquiry. The point here is that even if there were such things as aesthetic experiences, and art did provide them in some special way, it still could be the case that "aesthetic experiences" just aren't something we care about, as a category. Only if aesthetic experiences generally speaking are worth caring about does aesthetic reductionism provide any philosophical interest.

Similarly, the third claim also depends on the first, for obvious reasons – if there's no way to pick out such a thing as aesthetic experience at all, it's hardly plausible to cash out experiences of art in such terms. The second claim depends on the first for similar reasons. This makes the first claim, the claim that aesthetic experience is an identifiable type of experience humans have, supremely important to the aestheticist program. The second claim is also necessary to secure, but it can be made to fall out of the description of aesthetic experience (at least in theory). So, for anyone seeking to craft a convincing aesthetic account of art, one's attention is naturally and inexorably drawn to a single, basic question: what is aesthetic experience?

The Rise of Aestheticism

The idea of a truly special kind of experience called "aesthetic" is thought by most to be relatively new.[132] To be sure, Aristotle used the cognate word in Greek, *aesthesis*, to refer not merely to sensuous perception but also to a faculty of judgment and discernment.[133] In a sense, then, the idea of some sort of special categorizing and evaluating sensibility apart from the intellectual powers dates back to the Greeks.[134] However, for both Aristotle and Plato, the aesthetic good was just a special instance of some other, greater good.[135] Aesthetic experience in the sense we discuss it here posits a realm of experience with its own set of values that are irreducible to other kinds of value – aesthetic value is not a case of epistemological value or moral value, for instance. This thesis of uniqueness is a move we owe to the 18th century German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten.[136]

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[132] This is not the place to venture into a fully detailed history of aesthetics, nor would such a massive project serve our needs, but a few remarks are in order to make sense of what comes next. I mean to make no bold claims that would require detailed historical argument to settle.

[133] It's not clear whether he is conflating these things or merely using the term ambiguously. I am inclined toward the former.

[134] Gilbert, Katherine Everett. *A History of Esthetics*. New York: Macmillan, 1939. pp. 7-8, 52-53; Tatarkiewicz, Wladyslaw. "Aesthetic Experience: The Early History of the Concept." *Dialectics and Humanism*. October 1973, pp. 19-30. It should be noted that Tatarkiewicz attributes more to the ancients in this regard than Gilbert or, indeed, most other aestheticians, but nothing here turns on whether he is correct.

[135] Gilbert, pp. 59-60. This glosses a great deal, I realize. For Plato, the beauty of art was but an imitation of genuine *kalon*, meaning that art had no independent value. Likewise, for Aristotle, the pleasure derived from even good art was but a side effect of other desirable but non-art-specific characteristics of the works. The point stands that neither Aristotle nor Plato thought of any aesthetic properties as goods in their own right. The emphasis here is on "in their own right," inasmuch as "beauty" (and presumably any other desirable aesthetic properties, to the extent that either Plato or Aristotle acknowledged them) is just an aspect of *kalon*, which cannot be said to be an "aesthetic" property. Neither recognized any specifically aesthetic properties as goods. For a good, recent discussion of this, see Irwin, T.H., "The Sense and Reference of *Kalon* in Aristotle," *Classical Philology*, 105:4 (2010), pp. 381-96.

[136] Gilbert, pp. 289-291.

Having staked out a particular philosophical territory for the study of such experiences, Baumgarten is often considered the founder of analytic aesthetics.[137] As it happens, he was primarily interested in the philosophical analysis of art and took this special realm of experience (i.e., that is, aesthetic) and scale of value to be the unique province of art.[138] It would not be until the work of Wilhelm Heinse that we would find a theorist to posit irreducibly valuable aesthetic experiences in nature and cast the project of art as the attempt to recapture, reflect, and refine such value.[139] Heinse was a minor figure in German philosophy, but he was, in a way, the first aesthetic reductionist, the first to suggest that the irreducible value of art is a special case of similarly irreducible value found outside the realm of art.

The claim that aesthetic value is not reducible to other kinds of value demands an account of peculiarly aesthetic – as opposed to moral, rational, emotional, etc. – judgment. Programs that identify the aesthetic and the artistic can simply discuss judgments about art, which is enough of a delimiter to carve out a special and philosophically interesting class of judgments, so long as we grant that art as a whole provides unique matter for evaluation (and similarly unique value to be discerned).[140] However, once we recognize that we make many of the same kinds of judgments about the rest of the world as we are making about the supposedly unique matter of art – such as judgments about beauty, say – we are bound to make one of three moves to rescue the irreducibility of aesthetic value.

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[137] ibid.
[138] Gilbert, pp. 291-2.
[139] Gilbert, pp. 311-2.
[140] To be clear, I'm speaking of programs that claim a judgment is an aesthetic judgment iff it belongs to special class of judgments made only about art.

The first move that can be made is to allow that there are many types of value found in both art and non-art, with the understanding that where we make a particular kind of judgment about art (say, a judgment of beauty), such judgments are not aesthetic judgments (since aesthetic judgments are, *ex hypothesi*, judgments of a kind *particular* to art). This is a simple enough move, but one that seems ever less plausible as more judgments that seem most likely to be aesthetic are labeled non-aesthetic (since they are not applied exclusively to art). For instance (and continuing with our previous example), since we do in fact make judgments of beauty about non-art objects, it follows from this position that judgments of beauty are not aesthetic judgments. Even if we do not have in hand a clearly defined notion of "the aesthetic" this still seems implausible at best, especially as a judgment of beauty has typically been taken to be *paradigmatic* of aesthetic judgment, and the result generalizes to judgments about other *prima facie* aesthetic properties. This will remove from the domain of the aesthetic many kinds of judgments that seem to plausibly belong there, and is therefore unsuitable.

Finding the previous move unsatisfying, one could opt to find some other candidate for the special kind of object being judged. In other words, one could look for something else, other than art as such, about which one might say a judgment is aesthetic iff it is a judgment about this thing. "Object" here is used broadly, meaning that the candidate object could be a particular property (say, "beauty") or type of value. Inasmuch as "object" is used so broadly, this sort of way of characterizing

aesthetic experience is what Noël Carroll would call a "content-oriented approach."[141] Historically, the replacement candidates have often been characteristics that (one supposes) can be found in many kinds of art, such as "unity in diversity,"[142] thus explaining the initial attraction of equating aesthetic judgments with judgments about art. Picking out some other kind of thing being judged and identifying aesthetic judgments with judgments about that sort of thing – significant form[143], unity in diversity, or what have you – ostensibly serves the same purpose as identifying judgments about art with aesthetic judgment; to wit, it halts any attempts to reduce aesthetic judgments any further (since the candidate thing in question is taken as a kind of primitive). However, the new candidate object must be both plausibly primitive and plausible *simpliciter*, which is where many such accounts have run into trouble in the past.

A third option is to maintain that there is a value experienced under a certain qualifier in both cases, with the proviso that artworks are special instantiations of the valued properties. This is the converse of the first move, which insisted that aesthetic judgments are those judgments made *only* about art. That move was animated by a desire to retain the identification of the artistic and the aesthetic, whereas this one, like the previous, is willing to yield that particular point. Whereas the previous

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[141] Carroll, Noël. "Aesthetic Experience Revisited," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42:2 (2002), pp. 163-7.
[142] Blinderman, Charles. "T.H. Huxley's Theory of Aesthetics: Unity in Diversity." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 21:1 (1962). pp. 49-55.
[143] Bell explained "significant form" as something like the visual elements of a work (color, shape, etc.) *seen as* a pattern, a coherent whole. Thus, the significant form in a Mondrian is not the geometric rigidity of the lines or the unambiguous simplicity of the primary colors, but rather the *logos* that ties these elements together, the rationality of their existing together in this particular way in this particular piece. See Bell's *Art* (1914) and McLaughlin, Thomas M. "Clive Bell's Aesthetic: Tradition and Significant Form." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 35:4 (1977), pp. 433-443.

modification looked to identify aesthetic judgments with judgments about some class of things other than art, this move does not seek to identify aesthetic judgments with any sort of judgments made *only* about a certain class of things. Rather, it seeks to explain the special connection of art to the aesthetic by claiming that aesthetic value is to be found both in art and non-art, but that art instantiates aesthetic value in some particular way – particularly pure, particularly vivid, etc. This move, however, requires that we identify aesthetic judgment in some way other than with the objects considered, since any object is now fair game for aesthetic judgment. If we cannot specify aesthetic judgment by the object judged, however, we must identify it as a particular *way* of judging. There are two prominent ways of filling out such a "way of judging" account – equating "way of judging" with "judging the products of a particular faculty" and equating it with "judging while in a particular mindset."

Accounts that tie aesthetic judgment to a unique faculty count as describing a particular *way* of judging – in this case, through a particular modality of sensing. Aesthetic judgments are thus like judgments of sight or smell, tied as they are to a particular sense. Baumgarten wanted to identify aesthetic judgments with sensuous judgments as a whole, thus meaning that all sorts of judgments described under the rubric of one of the senses – sight judgments, smell judgments, etc. – are aesthetic judgments. In most modern cases, however, aesthetic judgments came to be identified with a particular sense other than the basic five senses. The posited sense is commonly characterized as "internal" rather than external, which is to say that it is not tied to any particular sensory organs (like eyes or noses) but operates in the brain upon the data

gained from the basic five senses, as a kind of meta-sense, like a sense of distance. Like other meta-senses, it operates automatically and "below" the level of proper cognition, which is why it is classed as a sense by those who posit its existence. The most common term for this sort of internal sense of the aesthetic is "taste" or something similar.[144]

Other accounts that describe aesthetic judging as a particular *way* of judging base the distinction on the psychological state of the subject, leading to the conclusion that aesthetic experience is the kind of experience one has when making judgments in the right frame of mind. One way this requirement could be filled out is by specifying certain attitudes the subject must adopt in order to be able to make aesthetic judgments, as with "psychic distance" accounts (more on these in a bit). Alternately, one could posit that aesthetic experiences are described by their affective content, which is a fair characterization of Schopenhauer's account (which posited that aesthetic experiences were those that lifted the subject out of mundane concerns). Either way, aesthetic experience is tied to the psychological state of the subject.[145]

To summarize, then, the positions on offer with regard to aesthetic experience (at least up to this point in the dialectic) are (a) aesthetic experience is the experience of some certain special class of objects (art, beauty, significant form, etc.), (b) aesthetic experience is experience by way of / through a specifically aesthetic modality such as a

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[144] Though George Dickie profitably devotes an entire book to the development of the notion of taste in the 18th century (*The Century of Taste*, Oxford:OUP (1996)), the most useful and thorough discussion of the issue I'm familiar with can be found in the second chapter of Dabney Townsend's *Hume's Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Routledge (2001)), which traces the general notion of taste as a sort of "inner sense" from the ancients all the way through to Hume.

[145] *Inter alia*, Carroll, "Aesthetic Experience Revisited," pp. 148-53.

"sense of taste" (much as visual experiences are those experiences through the modality of sight), or (c) aesthetic experience is experience of a certain psychological sort (a transcendent experience, a complete experience, a unified experience, a disinterested experience, etc.). The history of modern aesthetics is in some ways a history of the move from (b) to (c) and the varieties of this third account were considered the most promising accounts of aesthetic experience the field had to offer in the 1960s and 1970s when George Dickie first took up his dialog with them. Thus it is that when what appeared to be decisive refutations of these theories were offered, interest in aesthetic experience *simpliciter* dwindled and the aestheticist project in particular seemed moribund.

Although it would be rewarding to trace the development of the idea of aesthetic experience from Locke to the present day, to do so with any care as to scholarship and accuracy would require a separate book in itself, and as I intend to present an account of aesthetic experience that is more or less psychological in nature, it would also be unnecessary to our purpose. Although one could respond to the criticisms of psychological accounts of aesthetic experience by reaching back to some sort of modal account, a move to which the work of the early taste-theorists would certainly be salient, I intend to offer a kind of psychological account of my own. Thus there is little to be gained here by investigating the trajectory of the debate from modal to psychological accounts, so I pray the reader will understand if I pass over objections to (a) and (b) in silence and proceed directly to discussion of the most salient objections to (c).

The Fall of Aesthetic Experience

In contemporary aesthetics, aesthetic reductionism doesn't have much currency, largely due to arguments George Dickie advanced in his book *Art and the Aesthetic*.[146] Aestheticians had been arguing over aesthetic experience and how it should be characterized since the notion was introduced to analytic aesthetics, but no account seemed truly satisfying.[147] Dickie was not the only aesthetician to express his dissatisfaction with the shape of the debate; Morris Weitz, for instance, tried to obviate the need for an account by arguing that there could *be* no theory of art.[148] Dickie's arguments persuaded many in the discipline that attempts to find an adequate account of aesthetic experience were hopeless and that the project should be abandoned in favor of some other theory of art. He favored an institutional account of art, which maintained art's claim to special value and interest only in as much as it represents a group of special cultural practices.[149] Not everyone finds the institutional account appealing, but most agree that there are serious obstacles to aestheticist accounts.[150] There have been attempts to revive some version of aesthetic reduction – such as Gary Iseminger's New Aestheticism – but it hardly dominates theorizing about art the way it once did.

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[146] Carroll, Noël. *Beyond Aesthetics.* Cambridge: CUP, 2001. pp. 2, 22.
[147] E.g., Carroll, Noël. "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory." *Beyond Aesthetics.* Cambridge: CUP (2001),. pp. 24-37; Townsend, Dabney. "From Shaftesbury to Kant – The Development of the Concept of Aesthetic Experience." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol 48:2. (1987) pp. 287-305.
[148] Weitz took it for granted that an account of aesthetic experience could only be useful for filling out a theory of art, which is not obviously true. Weitz, Morris. "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics." Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism. Sep. 1956. pp. 27-35.
[149] Dickie, George. *Art and the Aesthetic*. New York: Cornell, 1974. pp. 19-52, 147-181.
[150] E.g., Carroll, "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory." p. 40; Iseminger, Gary. *The Aesthetic Function of Art*. Ithaca: Cornell, 2004. pp. 2-3.

As previously indicated, I find the aestheticist program appealing, but I also believe it would be unwise to attempt an account in that vein without addressing the original circumstances under which aesthetic reductionism fell by the wayside. Diagnosing the problems that doomed earlier aestheticist programs seems like the best first step in attempting to develop a new aestheticist position, and these problems all center on accounts of aesthetic experience.[151] I am convinced that such diagnosis will either reveal that such an attempt is hopeless or – as I hope – make clear the constraints on a viable theory. Therefore I propose to make just such a diagnosis, by examining first the most telling modern arguments against aestheticism and then what has been, historically, one of the most problematic conceptual attributes of aestheticist accounts. I will first examine George Dickie's watershed criticism of aestheticism, then turn my attention to Noël Carroll's informative objections to the position, afterwards summarizing what we learn from them about the problem areas of aestheticist theories. Careful consideration of Dickie's and Carroll's work will leave us with one further element that demands consideration – specifically, the role that the concept of "disinterest" plays in aestheticist theories.

A Note on Disinterest

Disinterest in some form or another has been an element of many accounts of aesthetic experience (and, therefore, in aestheticist theories of art), always serving as

[151] Because a plausible account of aesthetic experience is necessary to a workable aestheticism, sketching the problems of aestheticism requires sketching the problems of aesthetic experience. I will frequently speak of theories of aesthetic experience interchangeably with aestheticist theories of art, but I do not mean to suggest that a workable account of aesthetic experience is *sufficient* for aestheticism. However, as a contingent, historical fact, the problems of aestheticism have more or less amounted to the problems of aesthetic experience. I apologize for any confusion.

the distinguishing feature that separates *aesthetic* experience from other kinds. Although I won't discuss disinterest in detail in this section, I do want to make a few preliminary comments in order to put some of what follows in a richer context. Most modern conceptions of aesthetic experience are influenced by some notion of disinterested viewing, a tradition that is generally traced back to the earliest empiricist aestheticians.[152] Having a disinterested experience in the sense of having an experience uninfluenced by instrumental or other commitments was originally important to aesthetic theory because it fell out of a commitment to aesthetic experience as being tied to a particular faculty.[153] That is to say, because having an aesthetic experience was thought to be what happened when a particular faculty – the faculty of taste – interacted with appropriate stimuli, and because this faculty was treated as a kind of "internal sense" (with all the assumptions accompanying that

[152] See Dickie and Townsend, mentioned above.

[153] I originally phrased this "of having an experience uninfluenced by one's knowledge…" While I feel that is more accurate, it also conveys the wrong impression. Even the early empiricists didn't hold that one's interactions with art were utterly non-cognitive – this being an obviously implausible position with regards to, say, poetry, just to take an easy example. Rather, while they allowed that grasping the features of an object of aesthetic evaluation – such as a play or even a historical painting – might require perhaps extensive cognitive engagement with an object, they held that the *aesthetic* experience of the object was not the product of one's cognitive faculties. The commitment to regarding the aesthetic faculty as a sense (commonly called "taste," though not universally) cast aesthetic experiences as corresponding to what Locke would have called an idea of sense, which were distinct from and in a way counterpoised against the ideas of reason. This theme continued through early conceptions of disinterestedness and the faculty of taste through Kant, for whom judgments of taste are explicitly designated as non-cognitive (or, perhaps more precisely, pre-cognitive). Note, of course, that the empiricists did not explicitly make the cognitive/non-cognitive distinction; indeed, Dickie suggests that prior to Kant making such a distinction explicitly would have been impossible. Still, Jerome Stolnitz posited that the conception of taste as a sense entailed this sort of disinterestedness (i.e., that the aesthetic impressions of an object and aesthetic judgments rendered on their basis were non-cognitive, even if engaging with the object as such required cognitive engagement), and Noël Carroll argued forcefully that this position entails a kind of non-cognitivism, at least for the aesthetic element of one's assessment of or engagement with an object. See Carroll's "Beauty and the Geneaology of Art Theory," Jerome Stolnitz's "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterest'," (Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. 20:2, pp. 131-143), and Townsend's "From Shaftesbury to Kant – the Development of the Concept of Aesthetic Experience." I thank Sherri Irvin for pointing out to me that this comment, passed over quickly in the main text, might need some clarification.

characterization), it was held that any experience of preference or enjoyment arising from cognitive engagement with the object – for example, enjoying a song because you know it'll make you a lot of money – was necessarily no part of the *aesthetic* experience of the object.[154]

However, even when the sensory model of aesthetic experience was abandoned, disinterest remained a part of the accounts.[155] Again, without delving too deeply into the history we can observe that once aesthetic experience was no longer distinguished from other kinds of experience by dint of being experience in a particular sensory mode, some other mark of distinction was needed. Given the intuitive appeal of excluding such considerations as the mercenary and the practical from being considered as part of proper aesthetic experiences, disinterest broadly speaking, already linked to aesthetic theory, naturally suggested itself as a way of distinguishing aesthetic experience from other kinds of experience.[156] As shall be seen, however, characterizing aesthetic experience as necessarily disinterested experience – even given various ways of unpacking that qualifier – raises the possibility that there might be some experience of art that does not plausibly fit the criterion. Such a result would be deeply problematic for aestheticism *as traditionally formulated*, because we would then be in the position of being unable call "aesthetic" our experiences of core elements of, for instance, political works, which would suggest that the political elements of a political work are not germane to our experience of it *qua* art. This is

[154] Note that it is the aesthetic experience of the object that was held to be essentially non-cognitive, not the experience *simpliciter*. Thus, the (non-cognitive) *aesthetic* experience of an object might depend on the (cognitive) unqualified experience of it. See fn. 24, above, for more discussion on this point.
[155] Dickie, Art and the Aesthetic, p. 126.
[156] See, in particular, Carroll, "Beauty and the Geneaology of Art Theory," pp. 28-34.

clearly ridiculous. In both Dickie's and Carroll's critiques, we will observe, repeatedly, a commitment to some variety of disinterest causing just this sort of problem; it is for this reason that we will turn our focus more fully on disinterest *per se* in the coming chapter. As we turn our attention to Dickie and Carroll, however, we need simply keep this dialectical peculiarity in mind.

George Dickie Contra Aestheticism

George Dickie's *Art and the Aesthetic* played a large role in the sidelining of aestheticism in art theory, primarily in service of promoting an institutional theory of art. Dickie advances an institutional analysis of art, by which I mean that he endorses the view that art cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions *per se*, only as the collection of products of a certain set of historically related institutions (the practice of painting, the practice of theater, etc.).[157] He clears ground for his positive case by advancing two negative theses. First, he argues against Weitz's view that "art" cannot be defined at all. Since the institutional analysis offers a definition of art, it is important that he deal with the strongest argument that no definition of any kind (institutional or otherwise) is possible.[158] Second, he argues against the aesthetic

[157] Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic*, pp. 19-52. This grossly underdescribes Dickie's position, but his positive case is not really our interest here.

[158] For those who are interested, Dickie refutes each of Weitz's two arguments against the possibility of defining art, the "generalization argument" and the "classification argument." The generalization argument consists of Weitz suggesting that since any given subconcept of art generally speaking (such as "the novel") can be shown to be open, the concept of art must be open as well. Dickie deals with this simply by noting that even if it could be shown that *all* the subconcepts of art were open – and Weitz makes no effort to do this – that would not entail that the concept of art is open. Put briefly, a genus can be closed even if all the species are open. Dickie does not argue this so much as assert it, but since Weitz has offered no reason to think his generalization is valid, it seems Dickie carries the point. The classification argument is more particular; in it, Weitz argues that "even artifactuality is not a necessary feature of art," as Dickie puts it. (22) Without going into too much detail, Dickie rebuts this suggestion by showing an equivocation in Weitz's use of certain art-terms, to the detriment of his position. The

theories of art, which seek to define art as an ideal vehicle for aesthetic experience.[159] He sets to his task by arguing against the two main types of aesthetic reductionist theories: those that posit a special "aesthetic attitude" and those that define aesthetic experience according to its internal characteristics. He chooses the accounts offered by Bullough, Stolnitz, and Vivas as representative of the best aesthetic attitude theories available, while he focuses his attention on Beardsley's aestheticism as being the most notable of the aestheticist accounts that do not rely on some notion of an aesthetic attitude. Dickie proposes that if he can refute these accounts, he will have, by negative argument, provided support for an institutional analysis.

Although Dickie treats Beardsley last, we'll start with that thinker's analysis of aesthetic experience. In *Art and the Aesthetic*, Dickie characterizes Beardsley as aiming to "distinguish an aesthetic experience from a non-aesthetic one in terms of its own internal properties."[160] This is an approach distinct from that taken by the aesthetic attitude theorists (of whom we'll see more shortly). They attempt to distinguish aesthetic experiences from non-aesthetic ones by means of facts about the psychological state of the subject, leaving open the possibility of two people having qualitatively identical experiences that are not both aesthetic experiences (the two subjects being in saliently different psychological states). Beardsley's theory is squarely in the Deweyan tradition, positing that aesthetic experience is characteristically "united" and tied to pleasure derived from attention to the "sensuously presented or

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details of Dickie's refutation of Weitz are not particularly important to us here, as I take it as a starting point that such a definition is possible.

[159] This draws the aestheticist position broadly, to be sure, but not in any way that interferes with our analysis.

[160] Dickie, p. 183.

imaginatively intended object."[161] Though I am of course glossing Beardsley's theory very thinly, the relevant aspects, for purposes of understanding Dickie's objections, are: (a) that the unity of the experience is important to distinguishing it as a peculiarly aesthetic one, and (b) that the aesthetic experience is one where the subject feels pleasure.

Dickie finds both of these claims problematic. To begin with, he contests Beardsley's claim that aesthetic experiences are notably or particularly more unified than (putatively) non-aesthetic experiences.[162] As Dickie notes, Bearsdley's characterization of aesthetic experience was as follows: "I propose… a person is having an aesthetic experience… if and only if the greater part of his mental activity during that time is united and made pleasurable by being tied to the form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object on which his primary attention is concentrated."[163] While Dickie allows that it may be the case that the "typical" aesthetic experience is more unified on average than the "typical" non-aesthetic experience, he notes that many clearly aesthetic experiences are not particularly unified at all.[164] In particular, he notes the affective roller-coaster of watching a complex play such as *Hamlet* while pointing out that it is not sufficient under Beardsley's theory that the many and varied emotional responses prompted by the play be unified in virtue of occurring in a single subject – they must "have properties

[161] Dickie, p. 187.
[162] Dickie, p. 188.
[163] Beardsley, Monroe. "Aesthetic Experience Regained." Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism. Fall 1969. p. 5. Quoted by Dickie in *Art and the Aesthetic*, p. 187.
[164] Dickie, p. 188.

that establish relations among themselves."[165] Dickie doesn't really give any more in the way of argument on this point, moving from his example almost directly to the conclusion that "[i]t is difficult to see how the great welter of feelings evoked by *Hamlet* or most works of art of much complexity fall together into an affective unity."[166] Thus, by Dickie's analysis, Beardsley's assertion that aesthetic experiences are of necessity particularly unitary in some way would, barring some other qualification, leave out important experiences that clearly deserve the label of "aesthetic."

Turning to Beardsley's claim that aesthetic experiences are pleasurable, Dickie charges that this claim is unacceptable because it would make all aesthetic experiences affective in nature. If we can have a "proper" experience of art (whatever that means) without having a notably affective experience, then Beardsley's theory of art fails, inasmuch as it aims to be able to explain all proper experiences of art as specific cases of aesthetic experience (which, as noted, would require an affective experience). Dickie, of course, asserts that such non-affective yet clearly aesthetic experiences are perfectly plausible, which would, as noted, be a significant problem for Beardsley.[167] Dickie offers as an example a simple abstract painting, with a design that can be "taken in at a glance."[168] He says, by way of making his case, "[a]bstract paintings frequently arouse feelings and emotions, but the kind I now have in mind

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[165] Dickie, p. 193.
[166] Dickie, p. 194. For the moment, we'll allow Dickie the point without investigating further that he is imputing to Beardsley's theory the requirement that the elements be tied together in an *affective* unity (a requirement I do not find in the original statement of it).
[167] Dickie, pp. 189-191.
[168] Dickie, p. 189.

does not; one finds it very pleasant to look at and to continue to look at such a painting, but no feelings or emotions are produced."[169] The claim that one can find something pleasant and yet not experience any emotions or feelings might strike some readers as rather odd, which we will investigate momentarily. For now, it's enough to understand that Dickie's objection is that Beardsley's theory requires an affective response (pleasure) for some subject to have an aesthetic experience, something Dickie denies is necessary.[170]

These criticisms, as counterarguments go, are far from perfect. Dickie's charge that Beardsley's characterization of aesthetic experiences as "unitary" doesn't do enough to distinguish them from other experiences is reasonable enough, though Dickie seems to pass over in silence any possibility that Beardsley might be offering a revisionist account of aesthetic experience. More puzzling is Dickie's insistence that we "are frequently pleased by something without having a feeling of pleasure," a distinction he uses to press his case against Beardsley's second characteristic of aesthetic experience (that the subject experience pleasure).[171] His elaboration on this point seems to counterpoise "being pleased" against some sort of visceral, bodily sensation of pleasure. Dickie, curiously, gives no genuine arguments for this, preferring

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[169] Dickie, p. 190.

[170] I am assuming here that the real problem Dickie has with this theory is the requirement of an affective response, rather than the requirement of pleasure. If it were pleasure specifically that were being objected to, Dickie could have made quite a different, more pointed charge, such as that negative aesthetic experiences are, in fact, possible, in response to which Beardsley or some Beardsleyan adherent could have easily nuanced the account to require only *some sort* of affective response, at which point Dickie or some other thinker could make the charge that Dickie actually makes – that it is the affective response in general that is the problem, not the particular content of the affective response. Thus, the presence of "pleasure" here is incidental to the dialectic – we shouldn't read too much into that particular choice of affects.

[171] Dickie, p. 190.

instead to offer just a few counterexamples that are, one supposes, meant to persuade by their eminent plausibility.[172] The actual issue under question is sufficiently obscure that examples – especially simple ones, quickly described and swiftly passed over – are not, in fact, of much help. Dickie appears to beg the question against Beardsley, here; it's not at all clear that Beardsley wouldn't have counted the more intellectual sense of satisfaction cast by Dickie under the rubric of "being pleased" as "feeling pleasure." We are not bound to accept that what Beardsley meant by "feeling pleasure" was this sort of visceral, bodily pleasure Dickie seems to take it to mean. To be sure, if he did, then Dickie would be right to object that we seem to be able to have "art experiences" that are not characterized by such intense, corporeal reactions. It is not, however, clear that is what Beardsley meant at all, and Dickie does not delve deeply enough into Beardsley's own account to convince us that he did. In other words, it's not evident that the distinction Dickie draws actually tells against Beardsley's account.

That said, Dickie's argument seems convincing enough if we spot him a few assumptions. To the extent that we do not take Beardsley to be offering a widely revisionist account of aesthetic experience, we find that his criterion of aesthetic experiences being "unitary" does not apply easily to all experiences we would be intuitively inclined to deem "aesthetic experiences." Likewise, to the extent that Beardsley proposes to attach a *notably* affective quality to aesthetic experience, his theory rules out many seemingly proper and uncontroversial experiences of art from

[172] Dickie, pp.189-190.

being aesthetic; if indeed Beardsley would only accept affective responses that are as visceral and vivid as Dickie seems to think an affective response must be, then my experiences of, say, much of the art found in hotel rooms or doctors' waiting rooms or the like would be disqualified from being aesthetic experiences. Such works are meant to provide the visual equivalent of "background noise" – to be present and noticed, in a mild sort of way, but not to really engage the viewer in any substantial way. Allowing that Beardsley's position is as Dickie characterizes it (though Dickie provides us no reason to think it is), the "affect argument" carries through. Dickie's criticisms, while in need of refinement, are meant to convince us that Beardsley's account, specifically, is inadequate, but the broader aim of the critique is to illustrate the difficulties involved with usefully specifying by particular internal characteristics a mode of experience that must take account of so many (and so varied a set of) objects as aesthetic experience must. If we take it that Dickie's critique here works as a general critique of such aesthetic experience accounts as do not rely on some sort of aesthetic attitude, all that's left is for him to deal with those that do.[173]

Dickie chooses Bullough, Stolnitz and Vivas as representative of the aesthetic attitude line; having dealt with Beardsley's theory already, he suggests that effective refutation of their accounts would leave no viable aesthetic experience theory on offer.[174] He engages with Bullough's theory because, he claims, it represents the most

[173] It is important to note that Dickie did not engage content-oriented views such as Carroll's (which we will come to in the next chapter). No content-oriented views were current in the discussion of the era, so I assume this approach was not within the scope of Dickie's project. If Dickie was aware of some content-oriented view or the idea had occurred to him independently, he evidently didn't feel it important enough to address.
[174] Dickie, pp. 99-101, 113-4.

influential version of the view[175]; Stolnitz and Vivas he regards as having advanced less complete but more refined versions of Bullough's view.[176] All three are considered together in virtue of the fact that they each posit aesthetic experiences as the sort of thing one has when one adopts an aesthetic attitude. Thus, aesthetic experiences can only be had when the subject is in the right "frame of mind," so to speak. All of these aesthetic attitude theories are versions of aesthetic reductionism: they suggest that the provision of aesthetic experience is the special purpose of art. If Dickie can show that the psychological pictures laid out in these theories fail to convince, then their proponents are left with no plausible account of how to distinguish aesthetic experience from other kinds of experience, leaving them with no way to nominate the special sort of experience that art is meant to provide. Hence, refuting the aesthetic attitude theories puts Dickie most of the way toward a refutation of aesthetic reductionism *tout court*.

Bullough's version of the aesthetic attitude approach posits that the state of mind distinguishing aesthetic experience from other kinds of experience is one of "psychic distance."[177] Having psychic distance from the object of one's consideration is just taking a kind of disinterested attitude that is characterized in the main by a certain emotional detachment. He arrives at psychic distance as the salient feature of the aesthetic attitude by noting that despite having a genuine emotional response to (well-executed) tragedies, we do not attempt to interfere in the action. For instance, despite

[175] Dickie, p. 91.
[176] Dickie, pp.113-4.
[177] Dickie, p. 91.

having a very real response, say, to seeing Othello strangle Desdemona, we do not attempt to stop him from doing so. Bullough attributes this to our having taking a special psychological attitude toward artistic objects (such as the performance of a play) – an attitude characterized by a sense of detachment, or psychic distance, from what we are observing. It is this special way of looking at the otherwise tragic events we see unfolding before us that explains our reaction of interest and pleasure rather than horror and revulsion. Psychic distance is the special ingredient which, when admixed with some cognitive and sensory experiences, renders them "aesthetic."[178]

Dickie finds numerous problems with Bullough's account, but his critique amounts to the charge that Bullough's psychological picture is simply implausible.[179] People just don't behave towards art the way Bullough suggests they do.[180] Dickie rejects the idea that any sane person watching a performance of *Othello* would ever be in danger of rushing the stage to prevent the climatic strangulation, only held in check by his or her aesthetic attitude toward the play. The kind of psychic distance Bullough posits – a psychological stance toward an object that prevents us from reacting to fictions as if they were real – might exist in some form, to be sure; after all, we do seem to have some psychological ability to separate genuine tragedies from fictional portrayals of them. It does not, however, serve as the distinguishing feature of the kind of attitude we most rewardingly adopt toward art objects. First, such psychic distance would be irrelevant to the observation of many works. Dickie characterizes

[178] Dickie, pp. 91-9.
[179] Dickie, pp. 111-2.
[180] I have often wondered whether Bullough's analysis was animated – or at least inspired – by a worry over how we can have genuine emotional reactions to fictional displays.

Bullough as concluding that such firm psychic restraint, holding back strong emotional impulses to engage in some tangible way with the work, is essential to having an aesthetic experience, only to note that "if one… begins with… the experience of works devoid of strong emotional content, then the idea that *all* aesthetic experiences require insulation from practical impulses and thoughts simply does not arise."[181] Do I need psychic distance from a Pollock? What would that even mean? What impulses might such a work elicit that I am supposed to be restraining?[182] Second, such an attitude seems to stand in direct opposition to the kind of engagement many works aim to elicit. Bullough might think that we ought to have psychic distance from a war-protest song, for instance, but it would seem that the nature of the song itself is such that it does not benefit from that sort of distance; that is to say, a protest song is the kind of thing that one is, presumably, not *intended* to have distance from. Someone is confused about what an aesthetically appreciative audience is supposed to be doing, and Dickie is betting that it is Bullough rather than, to continue the example, our putative anti-war musician. I've only sketched Dickie's critique very broadly, but the thrust of it is that Bullough's picture of how human beings engage art works is psychologically implausible.[183]

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[181] Dickie, p. 99.

[182] Kant would have held that "disinterestedness" in a work includes utter indifference even to the work's existence (see, *inter alia*, Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste* (2001), p. 85). It's not clear that Bullough embraced such a strong notion of disinterest, as he continually described "psychic distance" in terms of emotional detachment from the subject matter of the work, rather than the work itself. If Bullough meant to take Kant's line, one would imagine he would indicated as much at some point, which he did not.

[183] It should be noted that Bullough at one point characterizes the distancing in question as a "putting [an object] out of gear with practical needs and ends." (Bullough as quoted by Dickie, p. 92) This way of conceiving of the distancing in question need not carry the dire consequences that Dickie takes as *reductio* against Bullough's position, so perhaps a version could have been advanced that would not

Dickie treats Stolnitz's and Vivas' theories together since they take similar though slightly different dialectical lines.[184] Both offer psychological models less radical than Bullough's that are nonetheless intended to secure a similar result – describing the sort of psychological state one has to be in to have aesthetic experiences of an object. Although neither plumps for anything quite like psychic distance, in each variation on the general theme can still be detected the *leitmotif* of "disinterest."[185] Stolnitz uses that very term to describe his aesthetic attitude, which he characterizes as one of having "no concern for any ulterior purpose."[186] Vivas uses the term "intransitive," which is the state of not desiring any particular outcome. He illustrates this with the example of aesthetically appreciating a particular play in a hockey game, which would – *ex hypothesi* – require that the observer put out of his mind whether the play will be of any use to his favored team's cause. That is, the spectator must not desire a particular outcome from the aesthetically appreciated phenomenon.[187] Dickie notes that each of the two accounts seems better suited to describe certain examples or circumstances but that they are united in the fact that while "having a purpose and having a desire are not exactly the same… they are similar in that a spectator having either relates the object of his attention to some other thing."[188]

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have fallen prey to Dickie's objections. However, Bullough's own choices of examples all involve extreme emotional reactions that must be checked by the subject in order to have an aesthetic experience, so Dickie can be forgiven for taking it that Bullough meant to imply that all aesthetic experiences involve extreme reactions that are held in check by 'psychic distance'.

[184] Dickie, pp. 113-4.

[185] Dickie, p. 115.

[186] Dickie, p. 114.

[187] op. cit.

[188] Dickie, p. 115.

Dickie's two criticisms, taken together, aim to refute both accounts. His first objection is that these theories would have us conclude that two individuals paying attention to all the same aesthetic features might nonetheless be having distinct kinds of experiences – one aesthetic, the other not – a conclusion he finds implausible, the result of an illicit distinction. To illustrate this objection, consider two individuals who are listening to a symphony. The first is paying attention to the way the themes are developed and the intricate structure of the harmonies (and the like) for no particular reason except the enjoyment of doing so; the latter is paying equally close attention to exactly the same kinds of characteristics, but does so for the purpose of being able to accurately describe and evaluate them to classmates the following day (we'll assume this is some sort of class assignment). Stolnitz's disinterested observer would have no such "ulterior" motive for paying close attention to the musical structure of the piece, so the second listener could not be in a proper aesthetic attitude (and thus, is not having genuinely aesthetic experiences of the work).[189]

Dickie finds it implausible that both of these individuals are paying attention to the same sorts of characteristics but only one is having an aesthetic experience.[190]Dickie, in effect, insists that having an aesthetic experience would have to be based on attention to features of the work and has nothing to do at all with what motives one has in attending to those features[191] – this is most apparent early in the

[189] This debate has recently resurfaced in the literature. See, *inter alia*, Robert Stecker's "Only Jerome: A Reply to Noël Carroll," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 21:1 (2001), pp. 76-80, and Noël Carroll's "Ethics and Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 46:1 (2006), pp. 82-95.
[190] Dickie, pp. 117-21.
[191] A requirement that will be taken seriously by Dickie's student, Carroll, in advancing his content-oriented account, which we will see in detail next chapter.

argument, when he presents as telling against his interlocutors the assertion "[t]he motives of the two men [listening to the music] differ… but this difference does not require Marvin's listening or attention to be different from Arthur's."[192] More examples are presented on the next several pages, but no further argument is offered other than the repeated assertion, explicit or implicit, that if two people are paying attention to all the artistically relevant features of a work, whatever the reason, it just doesn't make sense to insist that one is having an aesthetic experience and the other is not. This is somewhere between question-begging and appeal to intuition (a fine distinction in any case), but for now let us grant the point and move on.

His second objection is that these theories would have it that paying attention to certain kinds of characteristics of works would disqualify the observer from engaging aesthetically. Dickie has in mind here such characteristics as historical, social, or political aspects that might be ruled out, under Stolnitz-Vivas-type theories, from consideration in a genuinely aesthetic frame of mind. For instance, paying attention to the lyrics of a protest song so you can decide if it will be effective for motivating a crowd of college students counts as having an ulterior motive or desiring a certain outcome(which is how a Stolnitz-Vivas-type theory would characterize the sitiation), and it seems the point generalizes broadly enough to be problematic for both accounts. Indeed, given such assertions as Vivas' comment that when a poem is approached "in a *nonaesthetic mode* it may function as history, as social criticism… and

[192] Dickie, p. 118.

in an indefinite number of other ways,"[193] it seems any kind of preference for a work or for features of a work tied to an outcome that is not strictly artistic is a preference or way of engaging that would disqualify the subject from having an aesthetic experience of the work. Yet many great works take as constituent to their very identity a concern with just these kinds of things. Are we required, to engage such works *qua* art, to ignore whether their handling of such matters is adept, convincing, moving, etc.? More pointedly – are we failing to engage aesthetically with Handel's *Messiah* when we begin to consider whether it is spiritually stirring? Dickie charges that both Stolnitz and Vivas would be required, on pain of inconsistency, to answer "yes," and that this is a gravely implausible result. Indeed, Dickie points out that paying attention to a work for some ulterior motive, such as judging its effectiveness to some practical end (whether it be motivating protest or encouraging ticket sales) might usefully support critical attention to its aesthetic qualities, thus underwriting rather than undermining aesthetic attention (and, hence, aesthetic experience).[194]

Dickie's general charge, then, is that on the one hand these accounts disqualify from having an aesthetic experience someone who is paying attention to all the right kinds of stuff, but who is doing so for the wrong reasons, while on the other hand, they exclude from having an aesthetic experience someone who is paying attention to stuff that the work itself commends to consideration, for reasons of which the work would approve, but which are – by stipulation – *verboten*. Dickie contends that the sorts of motives for and objects of consideration ruled out by Stolnitz and Vivas render their

[193] As quoted by Dickie, p. 121.
[194] Dickie, pp. 120-1, 124.

theories untenable. Although I might quibble over the details of Dickie's criticisms of Stolnitz and Vivas, his brief against them is, on the whole, convincing. Some works do appear to be essentially concerned with just the sorts of things that are barred from our consideration under these accounts. Likewise, some motives for regarding a work that seem allied to aesthetic appreciation – such as regarding the work critically – are ruled out (Stolnitz explicitly counterpoises criticism to aesthetic appreciation).[195] While Dickie and I might part ways on specifics (and such small differences will no doubt be revisited and taken to be of some importance when I propose my own aestheticism), overall, I can assent to his conclusion, broadly drawn: neither Stolnitz nor Vivas has offered a viable aestheticist theory.

Nonetheless, Dickie's "ground-clearing" dialectic *contra* aestheticism fails to completely close the door on aesthetic reductionism. In dealing with Stolnitz's and Vivas' accounts, Dickie does not contest the claim that there *are* characteristics of a work that are irrelevant to its artistic (or, to the aesthetic reductionist, aesthetic) value, nor does he deny that there are reasons for regarding and evaluating a work's properties that are not in the artistic vein, if you will. Dickie's critique finds their accounts inadequate without declaring their project hopeless in principle. Likewise, while Dickie takes issue with Beardsley's account of aesthetic experience and is certainly pessimistic about finding a more perspicuous substitute, he never charges that the project is incoherent as such.[196] The fact that Dickie does not make the move

[195] Dickie, pp. 127-8.

[196] Although it's clear that Dickie wants the reader to believe that even if a convincing account of aesthetic experience could be given aestheticism would still fall through, he does not, to my knowledge,

to declaring his interlocutors' aims in principle unachievable is noteworthy, especially since, at the end of the day, his own aim is to declare the aestheticist project in general a dead letter. He questions whether any purpose was served by carrying over the notion of disinterest once the sensory model was abandoned, but does not declare disinterest as such to be intrinsically problematic.[197] In short, although Dickie's stated dialectical aim here is to clear the way for an institutional analysis of art, his arguments do not spell the end for aestheticism. If a better account than those offered by Bullough, Beardsley, Stolnitz and Vivas could be found, the debate could be re-engaged. It is, however, essential that any such proposed theory not fall prey to the objections against those theories already offered. Before we can formulate a theory that might avoid the criticisms Dickie offers, however, we ought first see what George Dickie's student, Noël Carroll, has to say about the problems of aestheticism.

Noël Carroll Contra Aestheticism

Noël Carroll, in "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory," sets forth an argument against aesthetic theories of art that is meant to work in parallel with, rather than replace, George Dickie's arguments against such positions.[198] Dickie rejects aesthetic reductionism, arguing against the leading accounts of aesthetic experience and suggesting that the attempt to put forward a plausible characterization of the phenomenon (if indeed it exists at all) is a forlorn hope, in order to demonstrate that art cannot be characterized as a means of achieving said experiences (a conclusion

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give an identifiable argument to this effect, instead relying on refutations of all the going aestheticist accounts to provide an overall pessimistic impression of the project's fortunes.

[197] Dickie, pp. 125-7.

[198] Carroll, p. 22.

that would follow *a fortiori* from being persuaded that there are no such experiences available).[199] Although Carroll concurs with Dickie's rejection of aesthetic reductionism, he proposes to develop a separate argument against it, one that does not rely on skepticism about the existence of aesthetic experience.[200] His argument is that proponents of the aesthetic theory of art "are treating art as if it was a subspecies of beauty" and that "if… it can be shown that aesthetic theories are reducing art to beauty, narrowly construed, then those theories are clearly false."[201]

The conditional has obvious bite if the antecedent can be shown to be the case, leaving us only to wonder if it *is* true. Certainly, it seems even the most conservative critic must acknowledge that there are aesthetic predicates of importance to art theory other than "beautiful," so to the extent that an aesthetic theory of art did reduce theorizing about art to theorizing about beauty, it *would* be clearly false – few today would deny this. However, the triviality of the claim taken as such suggests that Carroll cannot possibly mean such a thing. Why would one think that it *can* be shown that aesthetic theories of art, broadly speaking, reduce art to beauty, much less beauty "narrowly construed"? Is it plausible that aesthetic theories of art have nothing to say about any aesthetic property other than beauty?

This worry is both pointed and misplaced, in different ways. To be sure, Carroll's target is a narrow one, but perhaps not so narrow as it might seem at first. Carroll defines beauty for his purposes more or less as "that which is pleasant to sight

[199] Carroll, p. 2, 22.
[200] Carroll, p. 23.
[201] ibid.

or hearing" and characterizes later theories that invoke such notions as significant form, disinterest, and so on as little more than attempts to put flesh on the aforementioned "that," rendering the subsequent "which is pleasant to sight or hearing" appositive.[202] Carroll shows almost no concern with the focus on beauty *per se* (as opposed to, say, the grotesque, or what have you) while demonstrating intense consternation over the fact that such features of works as artistic intent, art historical relations, the moral and political dimensions, etc. are all irrelevant to evaluations made under the rubric of beauty (as he defines it).[203] That is, they are irrelevant to talk of what is pleasant to sight or hearing, strictly speaking; in this much he is correct.

His persistent worry is that the theories in question require their adherents to put out of bounds when considering its worth those features of a work that can only be apprehended cognitively, rather than grasped through the sensory apparatus. He considers the exclusion of such factors to be counterintuitive and lays the blame for such traditions at the feet of the reduction of art theory to theorization about beauty.[204] The clearest indication of Carroll's actual quarry is that his main problem with Beardsley's aesthetic theory is with the "construal of the art object proper as a phenomenal field, one constituted, for purposes of appreciation, of perceptible form and appearance"; in short, that Beardsley's "approach to aesthetic experience" is "noncognitivist."[205]

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[202] Carroll, p. 24.
[203] Carroll, p. 23.
[204] Carroll, p. 24.
[205] Carroll, p. 37-38; f.37, p. 399.

I suggest we can conclude that Carroll's objection would not be assuaged if we were to swap a concern for "beauty" with a concern for "the garish," say, nor any other such property. His real concern is not so much with the fact that aesthetic theories of art sprang from an interest in *beauty* in as a particular aesthetic attribute (among others, such as *ugliness*, *garishness*, etc.) as with the fact that they sprang from a concern with an aesthetic predicate that (as he characterizes it) is experienced in a purely sensual (as opposed to cognitive) manner. Indeed, while Carroll acknowledges that Bell and Beardsley explicitly reject the idea that they are concerned with beauty as such, he insists that they really are reducing art theory to a theory of beauty, over their own objections.[206] His evidence for this is that Bell holds that "the ideal spectator stays rivted to the surface of the art object…" rendering "considerations of art history and authorial intent… out of bounds…"[207] Likewise, inasmuch as Beardsley holds that "works in which the contemplation of the object for its formal qualities is not relevant… will not turn out to be art on [his] approach"[208] he, too, is a reducing a the theory of art to a theory of beauty *as Carroll defines it.* Obviously, Bell and Beardsley would not have agreed with Carroll's definition of "beauty," else they would not have insisted that they were not concerned with it. Inasmuch as it leads him to conclude that these theorists were up to something they explicitly deny doing, Carroll's choice to define "beauty" in this way is infelicitous, and I suggest things will be much easier going ahead if we discard his peculiar use of the

[206] Carroll, p. 32 and p. 37.
[207] Carroll, p. 32.
[208] Carroll, p. 38.

term and focus on the essence of what Carroll is claiming: specifically, that aesthetic theories of art reduce art to a theory of properties that can be experienced sensuously. Proceeding on this basis, we can render Carroll's charge thusly: "if it can be shown that aesthetic theories of art essentially reduce art to a matter of sensual qualities, then they are certainly wrong." This reading provides us with an argument that is of considerable interest, as well as one that is almost certainly correct on its face.

Before we proceed, it is worth noting that Carroll takes the "standard use of the term *aesthetic*" to refer to "attention delimited to form and appearance."[209] This raises the possibility that his charge is a question-begging one. If he's arguing that theories of art where the subject's attention is "delimited to [the] form and appearance" of the object are theories that are "essentially" concerned with sensual qualities of the object, he hasn't set himself a very hard task nor presented us with a topic of compelling philosophical interest. Charity impels us to conclude that Carroll cashes out "aesthetic" in this fashion as a result of his antecedent understanding of the history of the term, rather than carrying this assumption, fully formed, into his genealogy of the aesthetic theory of art. In other words, we would be poor colleagues indeed if we did not allow that Carroll is, at least for dialectical purposes, beginning without a firm conception of "aesthetic" in hand, using his historical investigation to *show* us that to *be* an "aesthetic" theory of art *just is* to be a theory that restricts its attention to the sensual surface of a work. Nevertheless, since Carroll allows that

[209] Carroll, f.51, p.399.

expanding the use of the word "aesthetic" would solve many of the problems he notes, and since numerous aestheticians have seen no problem in labeling clearly cognitive predicates such as "is clever" or "is incisive" as *aesthetic* predicates, it's hard to know what to make of his insistence that aesthetic theories of art are troublesome because they necessarily exclude engagement with various cognitive properties that are clearly[210] appropriate to the evaluation of art.

On the one hand, Carroll makes a compelling case that casting the "art object proper" in purely sensual terms had a direct hand in the introduction of the element of "disinterest" to aesthetic experience, an attribute of the phenomenon that played a role in Dickie's refutation of the whole notion. To this extent his project has a very pointed purpose – the existence of such a connection, taking the inclusion of disinterest as it appeared in Beardsley's theory to be a fatal weakness, speaks strongly against casting the aesthetic in purely sensual terms (as to do so would entail including a fatal weakness in one's account).

On the other hand, Carroll gives no reason to think that such a limited view of things is a necessary feature of an aesthetic theory. Indeed, he makes any number of comments that imply precisely the opposite. His brief mention of the broader, romantic uses of the term "beauty" in the evaluation of art shows that Carroll is aware of attempts to explain engagement with works of art on a cognitive level *within* the aesthetic-theory tradition.[211] Hutcheson's theory, on Carroll's account, allows that the artist's intention, for instance, is relevant to the aesthetic evaluation of a work, though

[210] I'm speaking in a Carrollian idiom here, not making claims of my own.
[211] Carroll, p. 24.

he insists that this is simply an example of Hutcheson being inconsistent with his own prior commitments.[212] Finally, he notes that Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment necessarily included a perception of the object of one's judgment as purposive, or perceived to be as though something designed (whether it was or not) – surely an example of a property that would by its nature be grasped cognitively, not sensuously.[213] In short, even if he does not make much of them, Carroll provides ample indications that aesthetic theories of art are not *necessarily* non-cognitivist. These features, anomalous to Carroll's conclusion, deserve more attention than he gives them. Without a better explanation as to why these examples do not undermine his conclusion, we cannot adequately assess his reasoning on these matters. Regardless, however, the obvious move for aesthetic theories threatened by Carroll's objections (which are good ones, so far as they go) is just to allow that one can have aesthetic experiences of qualities that are not part of the sensuous surface of the work. Why Carroll does not explore or even acknowledge this as a saving move for aesthetic theories, I do not ,now.

It would be too hasty to conclude that Carroll's argument is a question-begging one, but it seems clear enough that his argument does not force us to the conclusion he believes it does.[214] Though Carroll positions his argument as one that tells against

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[212] Carroll, f. 13, p. 397.

[213] Carroll, p. 29; f.19, p. 398.

[214] Carroll is opposed to aestheticist accounts in general, as evidenced by his comments at the conclusion of "Beauty and the Genealogy of Art," pp. 40-1. Specifically, he avers that essentialist accounts generally (of which an aestheticist account would be one type) suffer "awkward mismatch with artistic practice," as well as claiming that "the aesthetic approach" – without bothering to qualify his comments as applying to specific examples of it – has "evident shortcomings" and is based on "confused associations." Most telling is his straightforward claim that "the theory of beauty is distinct

aesthetic reductionism generally, it seems to apply only to aesthetic reductionist theories that hold to certain, not-uncontroversial notions of what constitutes "the aesthetic."

Nonetheless, as long as we are careful to restrict ourselves to the conclusions we are actually entitled to draw from Carroll's historical survey, rather than those he advertises to the reader, there are benefits to be gained. As noted, Carroll provides us with a persuasive argument that a non-cognitivist aesthetic theory will necessarily include a fatal commitment to disinterest, a non-trivial conclusion. Further, his essay provides reason to believe that introducing the mechanism of a special aesthetic sense (like taste) to the process of aesthetic judgment will lead, inevitably, to a non-cognitivist model, which, as noted, is undesirable.[215]

Summarizing Dickie's and Carroll's Criticisms: What We've Learned

Since neither Dickie nor Carroll demonstrates aestheticism to be flawed necessarily, a theorist un-persuaded to abandon aesthetic reductionism can still read their arguments as roadmaps to a better aesthetic theory of art. While neither produced objections fatal to the project generally speaking, they nonetheless identified serious problems in the leading accounts. Anyone hoping to advance a new account would be wise to note what has already failed, taking their criticism as

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from the theory of art." Carroll has, throughout the essay, identified the experience of beauty with aesthetic experience, an identification he reaffirms in his concluding paragraph, noting that "beauty theory can be referred to as aesthetic theory."

[215] See f. 23, above, for clarification on this point. Note that some of Carroll's objections could, I think, be answered by the distinction between cognitive engagement at the level of apprehending the object and cognitive engagement at the level of aesthetic evaluation, though he takes no note of this.

constraints on any further aestheticist theorizing. Let us, then, summarize what we learn from their critiques.

The first thing we note is that any aestheticist theory is in want of a plausible explanation for how to distinguish aesthetic experiences from experiences of any other kind. Doing so by means of the internal properties of the experience requires a differentia general enough to apply to all experiences of art *qua* art (since all proper art experiences are aesthetic experiences, on the aestheticist model[216]). This is no small order, obviously, as even brief consideration of the wide range of reactions artworks strive to evoke will demonstrate. Specifying aesthetic experience in a way that would exclude some of these experiences forces the theorist into the uncomfortable position of claiming that certain reactions to works *that are commended to the subject by what are commonly accepted to be the works' artistic features* are not, properly speaking, experiences of art as such (because they are not aesthetic experiences, as specified). This is such a violently unintuitive position to take it would sink any theory that embraced it. Even seemingly weak strictures on the nature of aesthetic experience can be fatal to the project. Dickie argued that the mere stipulation that aesthetic experience is necessarily *affective* experience is too strong to be plausible. Likewise, and for similar reasons, accounts that attempt to specify aesthetic experience in terms of a particular psychological attitude on the part of the

[216] *Ex hypothesi*, on an aestheticist theory of art, all experiences of art *qua* art must be aesthetic experiences. That is, it's fine if one experiences a work non-aesthetically as long as one relates to it as something other than art – experiencing exhilaration at its pecuniary value is acceptable, since that would be an experience of the work *qua* commodity. Conversely, an experience of the form and color of a painting had better turn out to be an aesthetic experience.

subject must describe the state in terms general enough to welcome all proper experiences of art.

Similarly, whether or not we think that Carroll's arguments indeed show that theories dependent on an account of disinterested viewing actually *are* of necessity non-cognitive, his arguments are enough to show that to develop a position that did carry this consequence would be a poor move to make. Carroll is surely correct to insist that there are so many features of works demanding of cognitive engagement and that are also clearly relevant to any artistic evaluation of those works, a theory that would exclude consideration of such features would be implausible. Assuming one wants to propose a theory of aesthetic experience that could underwrite a kind of aestheticism, one's theory of aesthetic experience cannot be such that it fails to respect the cognitively demanding aspects of aesthetic engagement.

Here, then, are the limits on further theorizing we can glean from the failures of previous accounts. Our theory of aesthetic experience, assuming it is to be compatible with some sort of aestheticism, must be sufficiently specified to mark it as distinct from experience *simplicter* or other kinds of experiences, while not so particular that it rules out the kinds of experiences that one might have of some things that are clearly works of art. If it includes some affective element, some specification of what sorts of affective responses attend aesthetic experiences, then it, again, must be sufficiently general that no experience plausibly regarded as being of an artwork *qua* artwork can be ruled out by it. Finally, it must not cast aesthetic experience in such terms as to prevent one from having aesthetic experiences of features that

require cognition to grasp. In short, we have many kinds of experiences of artworks, we have many emotions toward artworks, and we have – in many cases – complex intellectual interactions with artworks: a conception of aesthetic experience that hopes to underwrite a version of aestheticism must be able to look over this diverse assortment of experiences and call them all "aesthetic." Simultaneously, it must not become trivial.

The aestheticist theories discussed in this chapter each attempted to offer a definition of aesthetic experience in a sufficiently abstract fashion as to avoid mere list-making, but each, as noted, failed in different and notable ways – ways that have given us the list of desiderata above, in fact. We find, from looking at their failures, that in many cases the theories on offer were insufficiently abstract, leaving out modes of regarding or interacting with aesthetic objects that have strong intuitive purchase on the theoretical landscape. In the next chapter, we'll examine several of the current theories of aesthetic experience; I will discuss the reasons I find each to be inadequate to the task of characterizing aesthetic experience before offering, in the fourth chapter, my own, positive account.

Chapter Three

I am not, of course, the only one to have noticed that Dickie's famous critiques of aesthetic experience nonetheless left room for attempts to characterize the phenomenon. As of this writing, there are a number of accounts current in the literature, none of which I find entirely satisfactory. In this chapter, I will survey and critique current accounts of aesthetic experience. My aim in doing so is, as in the last chapter, to set bounds on a workable explication of aesthetic experience. By studying the weakness of other attempts to do so, I hope to produce a stronger theory of aesthetic experience.

The various theories of aesthetic experience I will examine in this chapter I have grouped by what I take to be their weaknesses (where there is more than one account that suffers from a given weakness). The first account I will examine – advanced by Alan Goldman – suffers, in my estimation, from the flaw of restricting the scope of aesthetic experience by virtue of the identification of the phenomenon with the experience of art. The next three accounts – advanced by Gary Iseminger, Jerrold Levinson, and Kendall Walton – suffer from what I take to be undue epistemic constraints, albeit of differing kinds. Finally, I shall briefly deal with an account of a different sort than those offered by the other authors in this chapter and thus deserving of special attention, offered by Noël Carroll. It is important to note that these accounts do not exhaust the accounts of aesthetic experience currently on offer

in the literature, but rather comprise a selection of the strongest arguments that have representative flaws, useful to our dialectic.[217]

Goldman's Account of Aesthetic Experience

In "The Experiential Account of Aesthetic Value," Alan Goldman gives his own account of aesthetic experience as he advances an argument that "the aesthetic value of artworks lies in the experience of them…"[218] Goldman holds that said value lies specifically in the *aesthetic* experience of artworks, a claim about the ontology of aesthetic value and not merely about our epistemic access to it (as I shall explain). Although I, too, am concerned with aesthetic value and indeed, like Goldman, find the issue to be inextricably caught up with discussion of aesthetic experience, my concern for Goldman's present argument is predominately with his account of aesthetic experience. Since the author is locating aesthetic value in a particular mode of experience, he is obligated to advance an account of that modality, to show how it is distinct from other sorts of experience. Indeed, Goldman asserts the importance of getting the account of aesthetic experience right to his overall project.[219] In this section, I'll present Goldman's account – which I find, ultimately, to be unpersuasive – and discuss what we can learn from its strengths and weaknesses.

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[217] Obviously, I cannot canvass all current accounts of aesthetic experience, if for no other reason than the limitations of space. Those accounts not discussed – such as Stecker's, just as an example – were left out because I felt the objections to said accounts were similar to the objections made against other accounts discussed.

[218] Goldman, Alan H. "The Experiential Account of Aesthetic Value." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64:3 (Summer, 2006). p. 333.

[219] *ibid*., p. 334.

Goldman almost immediately rejects the formulation of aesthetic experiences as "intrinsically valuable experiences," as is held by Malcolm Budd (for instance).[220] He offers examples of some experiences – such as "a massage, watching a sitcom, sucking on a hard candy" – that he does not consider aesthetic experiences. As will become clear when I lay out my positive account in the next chapter, I would likely accept these and other experiences that Goldman would consider counter-examples as being aesthetic, even though my account differs from Budd's. Goldman rejects these because they "are not aesthetic experiences of the sort prompted by fine art."[221] He goes on to explain "such experience" (presumably, experiences of the sort prompted by fine art) "in terms of the simultaneous challenge and engagement of all our mental capacities… in appreciation of the relations among aspects and elements of artworks."[222] Goldman notes that this is a characterization he had already given in his book, *Aesthetic Value*[223], where just such a view is also attributed to Kant.[224] Goldman notes, with apparent approval, that Kant "is explicit that the pleasure of aesthetic experience[225] derives from the full engagement of our mental faculties operating together and finding fulfillment in the forms of aesthetic objects."[226] Although Goldman is, in *Aesthetic Value*, unsurprisingly most concerned with explicating the nature of aesthetic value, his account of it seems to identify aesthetic experience with

[220] op. cit.
[221] op. cit.
[222] op. cit.
[223] op. cit. fn. 4
[224] Goldman, Alan H. *Aesthetic Value*. Westview: Boulder, 1995. p. 10.
[225] My reading of this is that "the pleasure of" is appositive to "aesthetic experience" and not describing some proper part of a larger, distinct phenomenon.
[226] op. cit.

aesthetic judgment, inasmuch as he defines having an aesthetic property as being "such as to elicit response of kind R…"[227] where "[t]he response to which R in the schema refers indicates the expressive aspect of aesthetic judgments."[228] Goldman is not much interested in getting "inside the head" of someone having such a response, but, given his other claims and commitments, I think it's fair to identify judgments of aesthetic value, per Goldman, with what we are calling "aesthetic experience." For those not quite convinced of the propriety of this move, further justification will be provided in the next section. As this is, however, an introductory passage, I'll ask the skeptical reader's forbearance as we move on with only what we have here.

Critique of Goldman's Account

Goldman lays out and answers (to his own satisfaction, at least) several objections to his overall argument. There is some benefit to our own project in examining them, but first I intend to address what I take to be a puzzling and problematic aspect of Goldman's account: the identification of aesthetic experience with the experience of fine art.

The fact that fine art crops up in Goldman's discussion is not surprising; he points out that whatever aesthetic value might be, "it should be a value that all fine artworks share qua artworks."[229] If we are willing to spot Goldman that claim, then for dialectical purposes, at least, it makes sense for him to develop an account of aesthetic

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[227] *ibid.*, p. 21

[228] *ibid.*, p. 22. This could mean that aesthetic experience is only a *component* of aesthetic judgment, rather than being identified with it. However, I think my reading is a fair one, and we will proceed as if it is the correct one, for the purposes of testing what a theory of aesthetic experience of this sort would be like.

[229] "The Experiential Account of Aesthetic Value," p. 333.

experience that can *at least* underwrite whatever kind of value all fine artworks share qua artworks. However, Goldman's charge against Budd's characterization (of aesthetic experience as being intrinsically valuable experience) is that it allows for aesthetic experiences that do not bear the sort of value characteristic of fine art – in other words, that it is too broad. Goldman asserts that the counterexamples given (sucking on a hard candy, etc.) are intrinsically valuable but not "aesthetic experiences *of the sort* prompted by fine artworks."[230] [emphasis mine] The use of the qualifier "*of the sort*" gives the impression that Goldman means for us to allow that these experiences are aesthetic in nature, just not of the kind germane to his argument. As noted above, he characterizes the experience of fine artworks as a full engagement of the mental capacities, which "creates a rich and intense mental experience imbued with meanings from all these faculties operating in tandem and informing one another."[231] Whatever one thinks of this assertion, he goes on to claim that "such complete engagement of our mental faculties is not only typical of aesthetic experience, but is the unique mark of it."[232] He is even more direct later in the piece: "The experience is not aesthetic experience, that is, fully engaged…"[233]

Let us take stock of Goldman's position. His account of aesthetic experience seems to be an account of the aesthetic experience of fine art and nothing else. I do not make this charge lightly. However, several of Goldman's remarks, taken together, lead me to inevitably to this conclusion. First, Goldman rejects what we have been

[230] *ibid.*, p. 334.
[231] op. cit.
[232] *ibid.*, p. 337.
[233] *ibid.*, p. 339.

calling quotidian aesthetic experiences *on the basis* that they are not the sorts of experiences prompted by fine artworks. In other words, he treats not delivering the kinds of experiences that are characteristic of fine art as *sufficient* reason to exclude something from his account of aesthetic experience. Now, while this would in theory allow for *some* experiences of nature to be included under his account, inasmuch as we presume some of them can be fully engaging and so forth, he specifically excludes experiences of nature from what this account, saying "I am concerned here with the aesthetic value of artworks, not nature,"[234] *specifically because* the appreciation of nature "typically" involves appreciation of characteristics that "many" fine artworks do not exhibit.[235] His reasoning here seems to be the converse of his reasons for excluding quotidian experiences. Whereas those were excluded because they did not offer the kinds of experiences found in fine artworks, Goldman makes no efforts to deny that experiences of nature might offer a fully-engaged (etc.) experience, but excludes them because they "typically" offer experiences that fine artworks do not. In other words, experiences have been excluded from his account on the basis not only of failing to offer the kinds of experiences Goldman considers characteristic of fine art, but also on the basis of offering other kinds of (putatively) aesthetic experiences, as well.

This would be, of course, a very restrictive view to take, and we should be sure that Goldman intends to advance such a narrow conception of aesthetic experience

[234] *ibid.,* p. 333.

[235] *op. cit.* Specifically: "I agree… that when we speak of appreciating nature aesthetically, we typically speak of its beauty or sublimity. However, the appreciation of the aesthetic value that fine artworks share is far different. Many fine works are neither beautiful nor sublime."

before we proceed. Goldman offers evidence for this interpretation when he insists that the he is offering an account that centers on aesthetic value not found in nature. We know he means to exclude experiences of nature (even ostensibly aesthetic ones) because Goldman identifies aesthetic experience with the experience of aesthetic value of the kind shared by works of fine art *qua* fine art and further claims that the kind of value that is *shared* by works of fine art *qua* fine art (and not just contingently found in *some* works of fine art) is not the kind of aesthetic value found in nature (per Goldman). Likewise, he distinguishes the pleasures offered by "full engagement" with fine art both from "mere" sensory pleasures (discussed above) and from engagement with popular entertainment such as popular music, genre fiction, and so on.[236] Give Goldman's identification of aesthetic experience with full engagement and his denial that simple sensory experiences, experiences of nature, or experiences of lower art forms provide such engagement, it is an unavoidable conclusion that Goldman identifies aesthetic experience with the experience of fine art, whether he intended his account to be so narrowly conceived or not.[237]

This seems to me too restricted a view to be plausible. Surely we are dealing with a concept of aesthetic experience that has been unacceptably circumscribed

[236] Aesthetic Value, pp. 170-5

[237] It has been pointed out to me that even under this account there is "the possibility that some life experiences (e.g., great tragedies, great loves) prompt full engagement of the sort we experience in response to fine artworks..." To the extent that this is so, the account would not be *entirely* restricted to offering an aesthetic of fine artworks, though I agree with the commentator that it would still be "unacceptably narrow." As for whether such experience can offer the kind of "full engagement" to which Goldman refers, I must remain non-committal. One the one hand, there is a sense in which individuals are typically "consumed" by such experiences. On the other hand, I suspect that the kind of "full engagement" Goldman is referring to is not the sort of thing that one *can* experience over any significant length of time (longer than, say, a long play or musical recital).

when we have to rule out experiences such as watching a sitcom or listening to "some early atonal music"[238] from being aesthetic properly so called. Goldman has not only banished bad or even mediocre art from the realm of aesthetic experience, but also the experience of nature (as noted above).[239] While I can offer no substantive argument for why such a move is mistaken, I can at least offer a consideration that counsels against accepting it.

Goldman's account identifies aesthetic experience properly so-called with the experience of fine art, which would imply that the experience of bad art is something other than aesthetic experience. I find it intuitively unpalatable to declare the experience of bad art a different *kind* of experience than the experience of good art, rather than to discriminate them as lying at separate ends of a single qualitative spectrum. If the term "aesthetic" applies only to a narrowly defined, positive sort of phenomenon, what are we to call those experiences that seem to be simply less absorbing – and not absorbing enough to make the standard for aesthetic – but materially similar? What are we to call those experiences that are not aesthetic in this sense but ineluctably seem to be of a kind with the aesthetic –for example, a judgment about "how something looks"? If these intuitions have any pull, then Goldman's account faces a problem, as there is an argumentative burden incumbent on anyone who claims that bad or even mediocre experiences of a given general kind of phenomenon are metaphysically distinct from good experiences of the same sort of thing. There might be an argument available to establish that fine artworks are not the

[238] "Experiential Account of Aesthetic Value," p. 335.
[239] *ibid.*, p. 333.

same sort of thing, broadly speaking, as artworks that fail to reach such heights of quality, but I have not seen one I find to be convincing.

What We Can Learn from Goldman's Account

Now, even if we reject Goldman's identification of aesthetic experience with the experience of fine art, his more general considerations about aesthetic experience are still of use. In the course of developing his own account, he deals with the objection from indiscernibles. This is the objection that the value of an artwork cannot lie in the experience of it, else we would have to admit that some work and a clever forgery of it are of equal value. While I have no wish at the moment to delve into the question of where lies the value of artworks, this objection against Goldman's experiential account of aesthetic value generalizes into a problem for accounts of aesthetic experience more generally. Under any account of aesthetic experience, it seems to be the logical way of gaining epistemic access to aesthetic value (regardless of whether that value is *in* the experience, as such, or not), so the suggestion that the experiences of two distinct works might be identical when the works intuitively have different values would be troubling. Fortunately, Goldman has an answer to this problem.

Goldman replies "[t]he failure of this objection lies in its equation of perceptual with experiential indistinguishability."[240] He argues that the experience of a thing need not be restricted to the *sensuous* experience of it. This same point was recognized even as far back as early empiricist aesthetics. Early empiricists, working from various

[240] *ibid.*, p. 336.

versions of a theory of taste as a sort of internal sense, put forth a rich account of aesthetic experience. They did so in the service of working out a way of explaining the apparent puzzle of how we can arrive at putatively non-cognitive judgments of art works whose features clearly demand cognitive engagement, such as literary works. Whether Goldman considers aesthetic experiences non-cognitive is not germane; what matters is that he advances a rich concept of aesthetic experience that takes in appreciation of the object's historical importance, place in the artist's oeuvre, and so on. The argument Goldman presses here draws on the same intuitions that suggest we ought consider the mobilization of our cultural knowledge when reading a literary work integral to the experience of that work, rather than antecedent to that experience.[241]

Goldman's account of aesthetic experience thus gives us a conceptual framework within which we can answer the problem of indiscernible artworks, one that allows us to attribute different aesthetic experiences to works presenting identical sensuous tableaux. His particular way of cashing out "aesthetic experience" leaves us with no way to describe *bad* aesthetic experiences, as they are *ex hypothesi* all absorbing, engaging, rewarding experiences. Thus his account suffers from a problem parallel to that suffered by accounts that define "art" in necessarily positive terms, but that need not concern us. We can import his insights regarding a rich and textured aesthetic experience without having also to take on board his valorizing description of aesthetic experience, since the one is not logically connected to the other. We cannot

[241] *ibid.*, pp. 336-7.

accept Goldman's account, since it would have us believe that aesthetic experience is something we have only when encountering fine artworks, a conclusion that not only violates our initial assumptions about the prevalence of aesthetic experience but also seems implausible in its own right. Goldman's account is disqualified from our consideration for being too narrow.

Gary Iseminger's Account of Aesthetic Experience

Gary Iseminger advances his own account of aesthetic experience in his book *The Aesthetic Function of Art.*[242] He is primarily concerned with developing a plausible aestheticist account of art, only introducing his version of aesthetic experience in service of that goal. While I also wish to develop an aestheticist account of art, I am eager to develop an account of aesthetic experience that stands as independently plausible. In any case, however, Iseminger's analysis is penetrating and will be of great help to us in developing an independent account. The details of his aestheticism need not trouble us right now; we can restrict our concern to his analysis of aesthetic experience.

In Iseminger's "new aestheticism," the "aesthetic state of mind" that is identified with aesthetic experience is "appreciation."[243] Now, by this I do not mean that Iseminger conflates *experience* with *appreciation* – he is careful to separate the two mental phenomena.[244] However, he explicitly notes that appreciation is the "aesthetic state of mind" in his account, which is to say that it is the state of mind that

[242] London: Cornell, 2004.
[243] *ibid.*, p. 41.
[244] *ibid.*, pp. 36-41.

reveals or realizes the "distinctly aesthetic kind of value" he claims is found in art.[245] Thus it seems obvious that Iseminger takes appreciation to fill the functional role labeled "aesthetic experience" that has been, as we have seen, filled out in so many other ways (such as "disinterest"). Iseminger himself refers to his account as an "experiential account,"[246] invoking the phrase "aesthetic state of mind" as a *salva veritate* substitute for "aesthetic experience."[247] Though Iseminger is at pains to point out that his account of appreciation does not rely on any analysis or prior understanding of the concept of the aesthetic, he admits that there is a crucial experiential component to appreciation *and* that the value that affords appreciation is aesthetic – this, to my reading, is enough to fairly characterize the experience of appreciating something as "aesthetic experience."[248] In this, my reading accords with Noël Carroll's.[249] In any case, even if both Carroll and I are mistaken and "appreciation" cannot be identified with "aesthetic experience" in Iseminger's account, I shall proceed as if this *is* the case, just to see if an account like Iseminger's could work as an account of aesthetic experience.

Iseminger defines appreciation, as he uses it, as "finding the experiencing of a state of affairs to be valuable in itself."[250] One appreciates a state of affairs by holding

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[245] *ibid.*, p. 3.
[246] Iseminger, Gary. "Experiential Accounts of Aesthetic Experience," in *Aesthetic Experience*, ed. Richard Shushterman and Adele Tomlin. London: Routledge (2008). p. 45.
[247] op. cit.
[248] *ibid.*, pp. 46-7.
[249] "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70:2 (2012), p. 165.
[250] Iseminger, The Aesthetic Function of Art, p. 36.

a certain belief about the value of the experience one has of it.[251] He further cashes out "experiencing" as so: "[e]xperiencing a state of affairs is having direct (noninferential but not necessarily infallible) knowledge that that state of affairs obtains." He specifies that "[t]he concept of experience I am invoking… is an *epistemic* one –a certain kind of knowledge – rather than a *phenomenological* one – a concept of something that seems a certain way to its subject."[252] He contrasts 'experiencing' specifically to inference (in the definition) and to testimonially acquired knowledge.[253] Now, while Iseminger separates experiencing from appreciating, rightly pointing out that experiencing is prior to appreciating, what is appreciated is a state of affairs,[254] and experiencing a state of affairs "involves getting it right."[255] As he puts it, "I think of experience… as a way of knowing in the full-blooded sense in which knowing that something is the case requires that it be the case."[256] In other words, when Iseminger refers to "experiencing" a state of affairs, he means "(directly) knowing that a state of affairs obtains."

Putting this all together, we see can get a better sense of Iseminger's account in terminology that is more familiar to us from the discussion thus far. Appreciating is, as noted in the definition, something one "does to" experiences, but it also seems to involve an experiential component of its own. Iseminger also calls his appreciation aesthetic, though he is careful to distinguish that he is not offering appreciation as a

[251] *ibid.*, p. 39
[252] *ibid.*, p. 36
[253] *ibid.*, p. 37.
[254] *ibid,.* p. 36.
[255] *ibid.*, p. 37.
[256] op. cit.

general phenomenon, of which aesthetic appreciation is only one kind. Rather, he is offering appreciation *sui generis*, as the aesthetic mode of experiencing.[257] Thus it is fair to equate Iseminger's appreciation with aesthetic experience. Since appreciation is *of* an experience (of a state of affairs, as noted above), it is a second-order experience: an experience of an experience. The subordinate experience is an epistemic experience, the experience of knowing something – that is what is being appreciated or, in our terms, experienced aesthetically. Thus we can summarize as so: an aesthetic experience is (a) having direct knowledge of (that is, experiencing) something *and* (b) finding the having of that knowledge to be valuable in its own right.[258]

Critiquing Iseminger's Account

We can immediately observe that this theory does not seem to restrict the scope of aesthetic experience overmuch. Virtually anything that *can* be perceived – experienced – and virtually any experience can be appreciated for itself.[259] This account, then, is capable of recognizing aesthetic experiences of natural phenomena, non-art objects, and artworks alike. The account's simplicity provides it a wide scope. Indeed, it has only two elements: an epistemic element (one must know of a state of affairs) and a valuational element (one must value the experiencing of that state of

[257] *ibid.*, pp. 34-5.
[258] This is a slightly different gloss than Carroll gives when he summarizes Iseminger's position as "knowing non-inferentially that the hearing of [a work] is valuable in itself." ("Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience," 2012, p. 165). I think this is a mistaken characterization of Iseminger, although, in Carroll's defense, he was not working from Iseminger's book, but rather an essay that summarized his position (*ibid.*, f. 1). Iseminger nowhere claims that the valuational component of his account – the appreciation – involves knowing. That is, while Carroll's gloss implies that one knows the value of the work, Iseminger actually only claims that one must know that one is hearing something and, separate from that, finds the hearing of it to be valuable.
[259] *ibid.*, p. 50, pp. 55-58.

affairs). While I find the scope of the theory attractive, I think Iseminger has gone wrong in his characterization of the epistemic element of aesthetic experience.

Let's consider what the epistemic element – knowing that a state of affairs obtains – requires for the seeker of aesthetic experiences. When I appreciate – have an aesthetic experience of – the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, what am I required to know? Am I required to know – as the old joke goes – that Beethoven's Fifth is only a third? Am I required to know that it is in the key of C minor? These questions are purely rhetorical, of course, because it seems obvious that I am *not* required to know these things to have an aesthetic experience. The mere suggestion is implausible on the face of it, an assertion with which I believe Iseminger would agree. It seems I am required to know nothing more than that there are certain noises I'm hearing. Indeed, I'm likely not even required to be able to identify the instrument or circumstances of production. It strikes me as unwise to claim that appreciation requires any more than that I know there's some kind of noise happening and that I value the direct knowing (i.e., the experiencing) of this fact.

Yet Iseminger would resist this reading of his account. Though he specifically states that things other than artifacts can be appreciated[260], allowing that one can appreciate not only events and processes but linguistic states of affairs, by valuing the what he calls "semantic experiences" (as in "getting" a joke)[261], he insists on maintaining the distinction between "experienceable in the epistemic sense" and

[260] *ibid.*, p. 49.
[261] *ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

experience in the phenomenological sense[262], where the latter is implied to be "debarred a priori from having the capacity to be appreciated."[263] It is absolutely essential to remember that "appreciation" in the particular sense in which Iseminger uses it in his account *essentially* includes knowing that a state of affairs obtains, and that state of affairs must, it appears, be something external to the subject – i.e., the state of affairs that one has knowledge of must be something other than just undergoing some sort of phenomenological state. Iseminger makes this clear as he argues that sexual pleasure and the effects of drugs cannot be appreciated as they are not "experience in the epistemic sense as I understand the experience that is valued in appreciation to be."[264] Thus Iseminger is using the term "experience" in a very particular way, one that does not necessarily conform with our colloquial notion of "experience," as one could, in the vernacular, uncontroversially refer to the "experience" of sexual pleasure or of taking a drug.

Given a *prima facie* reason, of course, there is no problem in deploying a non-standard use of a colloquial concept, so long as one does not subsequently trade on equivocation between the two uses. But depending on how one reads a particular passage, Iseminger either gives no defense of this usage of the term "experiencing" or only defends his curious account in one place, and I confess I am not sure what to make of his reasoning. He notes that "so long as antirealist theories of truth are a viable option…, an epistemic conception of experiencing a state of affairs that requires

[262] *ibid.*, p. 50, p. 58 [p. 36 is also a good source for the distinction; the quote may be smoother in your text]
[263] *ibid.*, p. 50
[264] *ibid.*, p. 58.

that one must somehow 'get it right'" allows one to embrace his analysis of appreciation without necessarily committing to realism about aesthetic properties.[265] Now, I have deep concerns about an aesthetic analysis that can only avoid realism about aesthetic properties by appealing to an antirealist theory of truth, but, in any case, the stance never addresses the prior commitment to an epistemic conception of experience, which is a not unproblematic commitment to make.

Considered under the rubric "aesthetic experience" rather than "appreciation" the problems presented by the epistemic element in Iseminger's account show through more clearly. Our intuitions tell us that finding something beautiful is a paradigm case of having an aesthetic experience. Surely, though, I can mistakenly form an impression that something is beautiful. Suppose I see a work from a moderate distance, form the impression that it is beautiful, and then approach, only to find that upon closer inspection and taking into account details not visible from a distance, the work is not beautiful at all. I am content to allow that I did not have a *correct* aesthetic experience of the work. I am content to allow that I violated a number of norms of viewing works when I (hastily) formed my impression of its beauty. Indubitably, however, I did view the work and I did – as a result of viewing it – form an impression that it was beautiful. Iseminger could consistently call it a phenomenological experience, the sort of thing that is not subject to appreciation, rather than an epistemic experience, which would bar it from being an aesthetic experience (using our terminology, not Iseminger's). This strikes me as odd. While I readily grant

[265] *ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

Iseminger that I am not appreciating (having an aesthetic experience of) the object in question, it seems I am having an aesthetic experience of *some* sort. I am assessing (what I take to be) the object's aesthetic qualities and forming an aesthetic judgment, yet under Iseminger's analysis, whatever it is I am doing is not appreciation and hence not an aesthetic experience. Yet in his account, no aesthetic experience of any kind is being undergone. I submit that it is only reasonable to call my experience aesthetic, even if mistaken or in violation of various norms for viewing artworks. If we reject this conclusion, then we are left wondering what to call my experience – an experience of something as being beautiful – if not "aesthetic." If both Carroll and I are correct in identifying what Iseminger calls "appreciation" with "aesthetic experience" as such, it is not a saving move to try to call what's happening to me an aesthetic experience that isn't appreciation; in any case, since we are proceeding as if Iseminger *is* talking about aesthetic experience as such, to see if an account of this sort can work, the point is moot.

Such an experience is exactly like a genuine aesthetic experience in terms of content; the only distinction is epistemic. Now, this strikes me as an illicit basis on which to distinguish modes of experience. Although many philosophers – particularly phenomenologists – talk of modes of experience, I have found no basic exposition of the basis for distinguishing one mode of experience from another, and so shall rely on my own intuitions here. To my thinking, the phenomenologies and the objects of the various modes of experience are the means by which we distinguish them from another. This claim might require some unpacking. While it is true that we distinguish

hallucinations, for instance, from other kinds of experiences, they are not a *mode* of experience in the technical sense of the term, with a distinct phenomenology and "subject matter," if you will. A visual hallucination is a realistic but mistaken visual experience attributed to an internal, rather than external, source. Modes of experience are by definition tied to the faculties that permit one to enjoy such experiences. Visual experiences are how we acquire visual data and come to direct knowledge the appearances of things; tactile experiences are how we acquire information about how things "feel"; aesthetic experiences are how we apprehend the aesthetic properties of things; and so on – these are *modes* of experience. I can have both veridical and mistaken visual experiences, as when I see an elephant or, conversely, merely hallucinate one. I can have both veridical and mistaken cognitive experiences, as when I have correctly apprehended some figure as the solution to a complex algebraic expression or when I have seized upon the wrong number as my much-desired solution. Even if we allow that the use of hallucinations as an example here might raise questions – is a visual hallucination a visual experience or merely something that resembles one? – certainly the particular example under discussion does not undermine the larger point, which is that in common parlance we consider even mistaken experiences apparently of a given mode of experience (say, a non-hallucinatory visual mistake) to be experiences of the *prima facie* mode of experience. Put more pointedly, we say "I thought I saw…" not "I pseudo-saw…" or something similarly absurd.

Rather than belabor the point by continuing to give examples, I will simply contend that the imposition of an epistemic requirement to demarcate the boundaries of a given kind of experience is inappropriate. If a mode of experience is an epistemic "access route," as it were – a way of gaining information about the world – then it is something of a cheat to characterize the modality as infallible from the get-go. Put another way, given broad assumptions about the general fallibility of human epistemic resources, it is special pleading to simply insist that one particular epistemic resource – aesthetic experience – is not fallible. Now, of course, Iseminger notes that his concept of appreciation is *not* "infalliable," but we are using the terms in different senses, in this case. What I mean is that it seems to me that any account of a mode of experience must allow for experiences that have the correct phenomenal component but fail to report accurately on the facts of the world. By contrast, Iseminger's account cannot accommodate errant aesthetic experiences at all, because *before* one can appreciate (i.e., have an aesthetic experience), one must have the facts right. On what happens when a subject is apprehending and valuing what she (mistakenly) takes to be the aesthetic properties of some object, Iseminger's account is utterly silent.

What We Can Learn from Iseminger's Account

Iseminger's account fails because it imposes the unintuitive condition of verdicality on aesthetic experience. Including it puts us in the awkward position of having to find another home for mistaken experiences that are otherwise identical in content to genuine aesthetic experiences. This move opens Iseminger's account to charges similar to those raised by Dickie against Stolnitz and Vivas. As the reader will

recall from the last chapter, Dickie asserted that it was simply implausible that a viewer could be paying attention to the (putatively) aesthetic attributes of an object and evaluating them for their (putatively) aesthetic value and *still* fail to have an aesthetic experience, which was possible under the theories in question. Iseminger's account falls prey to similar objections, though for different reasons. Just such conclusions were treated as *reductios* on other accounts and they are no more welcome here. The veridicality condition Iseminger seeks to impose on aesthetic experience might serve other dialectical purposes, but those are all "downstream" of the determination of whether it is independently plausible, a standard I do not think it meets. Now, it's conceivable that Iseminger, or someone interested in defending an account like his, could declare his account an account of a subset of aesthetic experience – an account of what it is to have an aesthetic experience of something, without being mistaken, perhaps. I am seeking, however, a more general analysis, so we shall move on without exploring this option in depth.

Jerrold Levinson on Aesthetic Experience

In the essays "What is Aesthetic Pleasure?" and "Pleasure and the Value of Works of Art" (in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*), Jerrold Levinson puts forth his own account of aesthetic experience by way of discussing what it is to "appreciate aesthetically."[266] Though Levinson does not directly state the equivalence of "aesthetically appreciating" with "having an aesthetic experience" in the two essays mentioned above, his approach strongly suggests it, and his later essay "The Aesthetic

[266] Levinson, Jerrold. *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*. Ithaca: Cornell, 1996. pp. 3-10 and 11-24, respectively.

Appreciation of Music" affirms it outright.[267] His characterization consistently refers to aesthetic pleasure, but in "Toward a Non-Minimalist Conception of Aesthetic Experience," Levinson claims that "the positive character of aesthetic experience is best understood as a *default*, rather than strictly *definitive*, feature of such experience"[268]; therefore, I think it's fair to conclude that his account *could* be generalized to an account that does not *rely* on aesthetic experience being inherently positive (which, as we've seen, is a reasonable objection to any account of aesthetic experience).[269] It specifies aesthetic experience as "derived from apprehension of and reflection on the object's individual character and content, both for itself and in relation to the structural base on which it rests."[270] In a more recent paper, he cashes out aesthetic appreciation of music as involving "some attention to the manner and degree to which the music, through its formal, aesthetic, and expressive properties, answers to the aims integral to the kind of music in question."[271] Although Levinson does not directly suggest that his latter formulation is generalizable to non-musical works, he references "What Is Aesthetic Pleasure?" (which is a more general account) to clarify his discussion of the appreciation of music.[272] Further, he goes on to state explicitly that the reader is not to suppose that his comments on the aesthetic

[267] "The Aesthetic Appreciation of Music," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 49:4 (2009), p. 418.
[268] Forthcoming, p. 6. Emphasis original.
[269] Levinson says a fair bit more in his brief for a non-minimalist account of aesthetic experience, but my problems with his claims in that essay constitute a separate set of objections to his account, not related to the ones developed in the other essays referenced. I'll deal with the claims Levinson makes in that essay at another point.
[270] "What is Aesthetic Pleasure?", p. 6. Note that the aesthetic experience (i.e., "aesthetic pleasure") is not identical to, but rather derived from, the apprehension and reflection.
[271] "The Aesthetic Appreciation of Music," p. 416.
[272] *ibid.*, p. 418.

appreciation of music supersede his earlier account, but rather only give nuance to it in the specific case of musical appreciation.[273] I will work, then, with the earlier formulation, as it strikes me as a clearer and more direct definition of aesthetic experience.

As this formulation clearly states – and as Levinson subsequently reinforces throughout his explication of how his account works – there are several parts to aesthetic experience. The aesthetic "character and content" of an object must be apprehended and "reflected on," but the non-aesthetic properties must likewise be apprehended at least sufficiently to support some grasp of how the aesthetic character relates to the subvenient, non-aesthetic base. This latter provision, which Levinson refers to as an epistemic requirement, is put forth as a way of ensuring that aesthetic pleasure cannot be reduced to "mere sensory pleasure."[274] Likewise, he believes this account sufficiently distinguishes aesthetic pleasure from intellectual satisfaction or moral approbation:

> …where a work has a prominent intellectual or moral or political content, pleasure in this remains recognizably aesthetic [*instead of, presumably, moral or intellectual, for example*] when it results not so much from acquisition of some portion of scientific knowledge or ethical insight or political wisdom per se but from appreciation of the manner in which… these are embodied in and communicated by the work's specific elements and organization.[275] [clarificatory remarks mine]

Thus, Levinson's account of aesthetic experience putatively carves out a distinct way of experiencing the world that is constitutive of aesthetic judgment but is,

[273] op. cit.
[274] "What Is Aesthetic Pleasure?", p. 8.
[275] *ibid.*, p. 7.

at the same time, distinct from other modes of rendering judgments of intrinsic value (epistemic and moral).

Levinson's account is admirably powerful. It allows him to explain aesthetic judgments of both art and nature with a single framework, a feature he takes to be essential to any reasonable theory of aesthetic experience.[276] As Gary Iseminger points out, it puts forth a modest account of the observer's state of mind, one which does not stray into "psychological myth-making," avoiding the charge raised by Dickie against Beardsley.[277] Importantly, it provides a plausible explanation of how we can take aesthetic pleasure in the moral or intellectual elements of a work.[278] Now, since I am ultimately to propose my own account of aesthetic experience, I obviously have criticisms to offer regarding Levinson's. It is worth noting, however, that my criticisms of Levinson's account are relatively mild. My own account takes no small inspiration from his. Nonetheless, we must investigate the limitations of Levinson's explication of aesthetic experience before we can see why some other account is needed.

Critiquing Levinson's Account

I raise three objections to Levinson's account of aesthetic experience, which I will expound in order of what I take to be their seriousness, from least troubling to most. All of the objections relate in some way to the epistemic component of Levinson's formulation. This is the stipulation, as you will recall, that aesthetic experience requires apprehending not only the aesthetic qualities of what is observed

[276] *ibid.*, p. 8.
[277] Iseminger, Gary. "Aesthetic Experience." *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Jerrold Levinson, ed. Oxford: OUP, 2003. p. 107.
[278] "What Is Aesthetic Pleasure?", p. 7.

but also the relation of those aesthetic qualities to the non-aesthetic qualities that underwrite them. This epistemic component does not cause the same problems as the epistemic component of Iseminger's account, as the epistemic constraints in question impose different burdens on aesthetic experience. The problems it does raise, however, are these: (a) it wrongly distinguishes simple sensory experience from aesthetic experience, (b) it does not adequately explain how much understanding of the connection between aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities is required before one is having an aesthetic experience, and (c) it does not succeed in distinguishing aesthetic pleasure from moral approval or epistemic satisfaction.

The first objection – that his account excludes mere sensory pleasure from the realm of aesthetic pleasure – is not really an objection against Levinson's account as such, since Levinson did not *unintentionally* make the distinction; it was just his object to do so.[279] On this basis and given my own prior commitments, described in the first chapter, Levinson's account is inadequate. This critique has no force with those who are not already on board with the aforementioned commitments; nonetheless, I felt it necessary to mention. Fortunately, the other criticisms retain their bite more generally.

My second criticism is that Levinson's account does not make clear what degree or kind of knowledge is needed of the connections between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic features of what is being observed. Epistemic access to this connection is crucial, per Levinson's own insistence, in separating aesthetic pleasure from mere

[279] *ibid.*, p. 8.

sensory pleasure.[280] That is to say, failing to apprehend the substrate qualities underwriting one's experience of aesthetic qualities bars one from having an aesthetic experience. Presumably, such an experience would be classed by Levinson as a sensory experience, but this is never made explicit. As has been noted in the analysis of other accounts of aesthetic experience, I am uncomfortable with disbarring an experience of aesthetic qualities from being an aesthetic experience, but let us for the moment set aside that particular qualm and examine exactly what one must know in order to transubstantiate a sensory experience to an aesthetic one.

As noted, Levinson never directly addresses what must be known about the connection between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic attributes. Presumably, two epistemic achievements are required *at minimum*: (a) realizing *that* there is a non-aesthetic substrate and (b) having some sense of how this non-aesthetic substrate underwrites the aesthetic qualities.

These requirements seem simple enough burdens to meet, but I contend that doing so is actually more demanding than it appears. Recognizing that there is a non-aesthetic substrate amounts to realizing the distinctness of aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties. This is just to say that it amounts to grasping the fact that, say, a particular movement of a dancer can be wholly described in non-evaluative terms that are non-identical with the aesthetic term or terms that seem to *also* apply, such as "graceful" or "dynamic." Far from simple and straightforward, this is a subtle distinction to make. I contend that it is not obvious to the non-critic or non-

[280] op. cit.

philosopher that the value term ("graceful," say) is detachable in this fashion from the applicable descriptive terms. It's my belief that the average person's intuition would be that our example balletic movement just *is* graceful, predicated strongly, with no strong sense of a mediating scheme of assumptions that link the descriptive to the evaluative. Even if I'm wrong about the status of the "average person's" intuitions, it is at least the case that the average person has no explicit understanding of this separateness-principle.

But is this really what Levinson's view requires of a given subject? It is admittedly difficult to demonstrate conclusively that Levinson's view makes such heavy demands, but I think it is a fair reading for a number of reasons. First, Levinson emphasizes the done by the phrases "apprehension of" and "reflection on" in his formulation of aesthetic pleasure (i.e., experience). He says that "to appreciate something aesthetically is to attend to its forms, qualities, and meanings… and to their interrelations, but also to attend to the way in which all such things emerge from the particular set of low-level perceptual features that define the object on the nonaesthetic plane."[281] He amplifies this claim by noting that "[c]ontent and character are supervenient on such structure, and appreciation of them, if properly aesthetic, involves awareness of such dependency."[282]

The same notion is expressed in the claim, "[t]o appreciate an object's inherent properties aesthetically is to experience them, minimally, as properties of the individual in question but also as bound up with and inseparable from its basic

[281] *ibid.*, p. 6
[282] op. cit.

perceptual configuration."[283] This seems to set up two necessary (that is, minimum) conditions for aesthetic appreciation: experiencing an object's aesthetic properties *and* experiencing them as "bound up with" and "inseparable from" the non-aesthetic properties. In a different essay, Levinson maintains this line, claiming

> …the pleasure proper to an object of art [which we know from an earlier statement to be aesthetic[284]] is one that is fully cognizant of the background from which a work emerges, the process whereby it came to have the exact shape that it does, the challenges inherent in the medium and material employed, the problems with which the work is wrestling, and so on. The proper pleasure of art [that is, aesthetic pleasure] is *informed* pleasure…[285]

Likewise his conclusion to "What Is Aesthetic Pleasure?": "Pleasure in an artwork is aesthetic when… there is also attention to the *relation* between content and form – between what a work represents or expresses or suggests, and the means it uses to do so."[286]

The case can be made stronger by turning to his example of a subject taking pleasure in Matisse's *Red Studio*:

> Aesthetic pleasure in Matisse's *Red Studio* is not exhausted in the delectation of its shapes, planes, and colors, or even in the relationships among them; it includes, for one thing, delight in the originality of Matisse's handling of space. *But such delight is inseparable* from a conception of what that handling amounts to and how it is based in, or realized by, the particular choices of shape, plane, and color that stand before one.[287] [emphasis mine]

The claim that aesthetic pleasure ("such delight") is "inseparable" from what would appear, by the description, to be a highly informed viewing of the Matisse in question argues forcefully that my reading of Levinson is in fact not overly demanding.

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[283] op. cit.
[284] *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*, "Pleasure and the Value of Works of Art," p. 15.
[285] *ibid.,* pp. 17-8, emphasis original
[286] p. 10. The "also" is in reference to an earlier comment about attention to the form of the work.
[287] "What Is Aesthetic Pleasure?", p. 7

Further, such a reading is in line with Levinson's comments elsewhere. In "Musical Literacy,"[288] Levinson considers a subject "confronted for the first time with the first movement of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony." He asks, rhetorically, "[w]hat must such a listener be in possession of, cognitively speaking, if he is to grasp this music…?"[289] He goes on to give a list of ten things the "comprehending listener" must know, a list that requires a great deal of technical and historical knowledge – certainly much more than any given casual listener will possess.[290] Much to my frustration, Levinson never elucidates the connection or lack thereof between his term "grasp" as used here to "apprehension of" or "reflection on" as used in the essay "What Is Aesthetic Pleasure?" Nonetheless, the list of the sorts of things the "comprehending listener" is required to know about music in order to "hear what Bruckner is saying"[291] bears a striking resemblance to the accounting of the sorts of things that are called "inseparable" from the aesthetic pleasure that can be derived from Matisse's *Red Studio*. The claim that aesthetic experience ("aesthetic pleasure") is "inseparable" from such extensive knowledge of art criticism and art history is simply the claim that one cannot have a genuinely aesthetic experience without possessing such knowledge, however unfortunate that result may be for Levinson's account.

Now, it must be granted that individually, none of these quotes definitively establishes that full artistic literacy is required for aesthetic experience, in Levinson's account, largely because Levinson never *directly* addresses the matter either way. This

[288] The Pleasures of Aesthetics, pp. 27-41
[289] *ibid.*, p. 30
[290] *ibid.*, pp. 30-1
[291] *ibid*., p. 30

lacuna leaves the exegete of Levinson's work in an awkward position. For instance, if "grasping" a piece of music is meant to be the same as "reflecting on" a work, having an aesthetic experience of a work then requires immense technical and historical knowledge. On the one hand, this would seem to be a fair conclusion, given that Levinson specifically states that his account of "grasping" music is supposed to fill out his more general account of appreciation, but, on the other hand, this would also seem to be an undesirable conclusion, one not favorable to Levinson's account. And in any case, if Levinson did not mean his discussion of "grasping" a musical work to inform what is required for "reflecting on" a work, we are left to wonder where the discussion of "grasping" a musical work goes, theoretically speaking (and are likewise left with larger gaps than we would otherwise have in our understanding of what it means to reflect on a work of any sort). Similarly, in Levinson's discussion of Matisse's *Red Studio* (and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, immediately preceding), it's not clear whether lacking a highly informed understanding of the works in question prevents a *full* aesthetic experience or just prevents aesthetic experience, full stop. Recruiting his comment that the "proper pleasure of art is *informed* pleasure" to clarify these examples again leaves us with a position that seems to make unreasonable epistemic demands. The alternative, however, is to allow that Levinson's account is disjointed, even riddled with vagaries. Neither seems palatable, especially if we want to be as generous to Levinson as possible.

It is my opinion that Levinson's various claims should all be read of a piece, an approach which leads inexorably, I think, to the conclusion that his account requires a

heavy epistemic burden for aesthetic experience. This claim is based not on any single quote that provides undeniable evidence for it – none exists that I can find, for either the strong reading or its definite negation. Between reading his various claims as disjointed and vague or, by contrast, univocal but mistaken, I choose the latter. However, in acknowledgement of the fact that my reading cannot be taken as a *certain* interpretation of Levinson's account, I propose to proceed as if Levinson's account does, in fact, require the heavy epistemic burden I impute to it while leaving open the possibility that it does not. My account will differ from Levinson's in the end, anyway, so the critique of Levinson's account is as much for rhetorical purposes (i.e., for establishing what should be avoided in offering my own account) as for actually finding reason to reject Levinson's account. Nonetheless, I will make mention of both the "strict" and "lenient" readings of Levinson when it comes time to explain why I have chosen to reject his account.

That said, let's look at what it is I'm suggesting when I assert that the average person's intuitions do not meet the burdens imposed by Levinson's epistemic constraint. The epistemic constraint apparently requires that the observer have some sense (even if mistaken) of *how* the aesthetic predicates relate to the non-aesthetic base, which is precisely what holding the kinds of intuitions I've described precludes. I submit that having an awareness (for any attribution worthy of the term) of *how* value predicates relate to non-value predicates necessarily involves some minimal ability to articulate counterfactuals – that is, some approximate sense of what changes would have to have been made to the non-aesthetic substrate in order to achieve a change to

the aesthetic evaluation.[292] Now, it's not my contention that casual observers *never* have such an awareness. It's perfectly plausible to think that the average person might assent to the proposition "If Metallica had used banjos instead of electric guitars, their songs wouldn't sound so menacing." Rather, my contention is simply that any awareness of the distinctness-principle – where it is present at all – is so broad and unfocused as to preclude any genuine reflection on present aesthetic judgments and their relationship to likewise present non-aesthetic facts. While the average person is certainly capable, on requirement, of conjuring scenarios under which present performances would have *failed* to make a given aesthetic impression, our putative casual observer may be having an aesthetic experience without being capable of anything that would qualify as "reflection" on the relationship of the actually occurrent aesthetic and non-aesthetic predicates.

This claim might strike some as controversial. I should be clear that I am not claiming that the average subject cannot *identify* the non-aesthetic features that underwrite the aesthetic features. One might very well realize that the use of red and yellow is part of what makes the painting she's looking at seem "bold" or "garish." By the "strict" reading of Levinson's account, however, such a general awareness – that the substrate qualities stand in *some* undefined relation to the aesthetic ones – cannot fulfill Levinson's requirement for *understanding*. In order to come to anything one

[292] It has been called into question whether a subject need be able to articulate the relevant counterfactuals or merely be able to assent to them when they are presented. Since Levinson frequently emphasizes that aesthetic features must be *understood* in relation to their nonaesthetic bases, I think this comes down to a question of what we think "understanding" requires. Nothing very much turns on this particular point, I think, so I will leave the clarification of understanding as an epistemic state to the epistemologists.

might call "understanding" of the role that the non-aesthetic predicates play in the attribution of the relevant aesthetic predicates, one must be able to say something specific about the relationship at work, as is indicated by Levinson's insistence that aesthetic pleasure be "individualizing, appreciating an object for what it distinctively, if not uniquely, is."[293] Levinson claims that what is distinctive about any given work is "the specific *complex* of the work's character and content with the particular perceptual substructure that supports it."[294] Although I admit Levinson never provides perfect clarity on the matter, in the broader context of his thought, I cannot reconcile this statement (nor other, similar statements) with any reading less demanding than the one I am offering here.

Obviously, I find this sort of requirement overly demanding. Without at least some training in the appreciative practices for the art-form in question, the mental furniture required simply is not present to grasp the kinds of connections that Levinson insists are required to undergo an aesthetic experience. If I am right, and the average Metallica fan is simply assigning predicates like "dark" and "foreboding" directly to the music without any substantive awareness of how such predicates might relate to the physical facts of the music (like the E flat tuning of the guitars), then our example fan is *generally* not having aesthetic experiences when listening to music, even music to which he assigns unambiguously aesthetic predicates. I consider this an extremely problematic conclusion.

[293] *ibid.*, p. 3
[294] *ibid.*, pp. 6-7

My third objection to Levinson's account could well be the most serious for his project, but I must qualify this challenge by noting that I am unsure of its foundation. If the objection proves sound, it is devastating; if not, then I will have, at most, highlighted a concern that my own account must answer at least as well as Levinson's. The worry in question is that his account fails to adequately distinguish aesthetic pleasure from moral approval or epistemic satisfaction. Levinson's account requires that the object's "individual character and content" be appreciated both "for itself" and "in relation to the structural base on which it rests."[295] I'm assuming that the requirement that an object be appreciated "for itself" rules out any object which would only be appreciated instrumentally, but this is hardly enough to get us from appreciation generally to *aesthetic* appreciation particularly. After all, it is commonly held that we appreciate for themselves both moral and epistemic goods, as well. Even if the point could be (and has been) argued, the view has enough traction that we are owed some explanation as to how these are distinct, or – alternately – an argument as to why we ought suppose they are not.

Now, Levinson does clarify this in at least two other places. Discussing appreciation of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, he asserts "…the satisfaction is properly aesthetic in those latter cases precisely when such symbolic or moral content is apprehended in and through the body of the literary work itself… and not as something abstractable from them."[296] He echoes and expands this when he directly addresses the question of how we distinguish aesthetic pleasure from cognitive or

[295] *ibid.*, p. 6. Full formulation quoted earlier.
[296] *ibid.*, p. 7

intellectual pleasures (for instance), noting that "aesthetic pleasures always involve an appreciation of contents-in-relation-to-vehicles-or-supports…," contrasting them to "…purely intellectual pleasures, in which satisfaction is grounded in the acquisition of knowledge or insight as such, for themselves, independent of how they are conveyed."[297] Levinson clearly means to claim that aesthetic pleasure (his term for aesthetic experience – see above) is derived not from coming to direct knowledge that a given object *has* a certain aesthetic predicate, but from the experience of how the object's particular non-aesthetic features underwrite the aesthetic features. Likewise, he clearly intends to contrast this with his ideas about how we come to have moral or intellectual pleasure, which he takes to be, it seems, a matter of simply determining that a given object *has* the pleasing intellectual or moral attributes, regardless of how they are embodied. The matter of whether his account adequately distinguishes aesthetic pleasure from moral or intellectual turns then on two questions: first, does Levinson's formulation as stated actually support the flesh he puts on his characterization, and, second, are his claims about moral and intellectual pleasure correct?

The first question can be quickly disposed of in the affirmative, as it is obvious that Levinson's careful characterization of aesthetic pleasure as deriving from the object's "individual character and content" supports his expanded comments on the nature of aesthetic pleasure. This clause in his analysis does the work of, in his words, "individualizing" aesthetic pleasure, making it a matter of "appreciating an object for

[297] *ibid.*, p. 8

what it distinctively, if not uniquely, is."[298] Our attention, then, must rest on the second question. Unfortunately, I have no clear answer to give on this question. However, even if I cannot make a conclusive case that Levinson is mistaken on this point, I can at least offer considerations suggesting that the matter is not entirely clear-cut, which would mean that Levinson at least owes us more argument to support his characterization of intellectual and moral pleasure as contrasted to aesthetic pleasure.

Let's begin by looking at an example of how we appreciate moral value. An act can be described in non-moral terms as well as in moral terms, presumably in a way analogous to how aesthetic attributes supervene on non-aesthetic ones. Suppose I observe a man doing some act of kindness and thus come to some moral approbation (or moral pleasure, if you will) from this fact. Levinson takes for granted that my particularly *moral* approbation is confined to the determination of the moral attributes of the act, which can be abstracted from the non-moral particulars. Levinson's intuition here can only hold, however, if moral analysis proceeds by determining whether a given act fits certain criteria indicating that it thereby has some moral property – in other words, if the moral value of an act is dependent not on the act's individual character but on whether or not it exemplifies some *kind* of act that has a certain moral property. The latter case, I take it, represents a situation in which the moral value of the act is, in Levinson's words, "abstractable" from it, while the former case does not. That is, the fact that one can discuss the moral value of *kinds* of acts

[298] *ibid.*, p. 3

underwrites Levinson's intuition, here, which is contrasted with the observation that one cannot similarly discuss the aesthetic value of *kinds* of artworks. In the former case, the value is abstractable from the particular, while in the latter, it is not.

There are several responses to this position, of varying significance. It strikes me as plausible to believe that my moral appreciation is not limited to the mere kindness of the act, but to the way in which the kindness arises from the non-moral particulars of the situation: the fact that the man stopped to consider the effect of his behavior on others, the fact that such behavior was unusual for someone like him in his particular situation, the fact that the act in question caused him some inconvenience, and so on. These disparate particulars, considered as constituent components of a moral act, seem likely occasions for particularly *moral* approbation. In other words, it is arguably true that while we can arrive at a verdict on the moral value of an act by abstraction, moral pleasure may be only appropriate or likely in response to specific moral acts. Indeed, one could argue that being able to have a particularly moral response to the non-moral particulars of a moral act is essential to developing moral understanding. However, I must admit that it is not immediately apparent to me how such an argument would proceed.

A more robust response is available to the moral particularist. Though particularism is hardly the dominant position in ethics at current, it represents a going concern in the overall debate, and so cannot be dismissed out of hand. Whatever the ultimate verdict on particularism might be, the particularist is in a position to deny Levinson's intuitions about moral pleasure outright, as most varieties of moral

particularism generally hold that it is the non-moral features of particular circumstances that "combine to make something morally relevant in the first place."[299] The emphasis here is on the *particular* circumstances. While it is obviously the case that even for moral non-particularists, the moral features of some event arise from one or more of the non-moral features, particularism differs in that it insists that *some* number of the features of a given event will prove to be morally relevant for that unique occurrence, but it's impossible to say in advance which features will be relevant in this manner, or what weight any given feature will carry. This is contrast to the non-particularlist approach, where we are safe in assuming that a few or even one feature of a given situation will be morally relevant per some general moral principle. That is to say, the mechanics of coming to moral approbation of something would be identical to those described by Levinson as characterizing coming to aesthetic approval of some object – a matter of observing how the (in this case, moral) value arises from the *particular* descriptive features of the object of consideration in a particular, unique arrangement.

Now, it is obviously not a fatal flaw in Levinson's account that it cannot cope with a given flavor of ethics, especially when it is a minority view. That said, even if one is not a moral particularist, I think there's room to argue that moral pleasure does not arise *solely* from the abstract consideration of whether a given act has a given moral value, as opposed to consideration of *the way in which* the act exemplifies such value. That said, it is conceivable that Levinson could respond that the pleasure in the latter

[299] McKeever, Sean and Michael Ridge. "Preempting Principles: Recent Debates in Moral Particularism," *Philosophy Compass*, 3:6 (2008), pp. 1182-4

case is, in fact, aesthetic. It is not my intent to argue that the above suggestions are in any way *obviously* true, nor do I suggest that it is a settled matter that we have such responses. I only argue that it is not *implausible* to make these suppositions. If I am correct, then Levinson owes us some further explanation of how – or whether – his account can distinguish aesthetic from moral appreciation.

Let's see if the situation is the same with epistemic evaluation. Levinson mentions that intellectual appreciation focuses on the transmission of knowledge without worrying about how it is delivered.[300] Inasmuch as we are only concerned with knowledge, this may well be true. However, it is not obvious, at least not to epistemologists, that knowledge is the only or even the most important epistemically valuable state. If we were talking about understanding, for instance, the matter of epistemic appraisal seems inextricably tied up in the particular form that the understanding takes. Conferring epistemic approbation, which we may take in this case to be the analogous state to enjoying aesthetic pleasure, is a matter not only of valuing the epistemic property – being an instance of understanding – for itself, but also of reflecting on how the epistemic property supervenes on the descriptive base; indeed, this latter element could plausibly be described as *necessary* to the former. Under many epistemic theories, coming to grasp something in the right *way* is essential for that epistemic state to be approved of as knowledge or understanding, as appropriate. This is, after all, the whole point of Gettier cases – to show that epistemic appraisal (i.e., the attribution of knowledge or lack thereof) is intimately bound up

[300] "What Is Aesthetic Pleasure?", p. 8

with an assessment of the non-epistemic, descriptive features of the particular circumstance.

In the end, it is not clear to me that Levinson's notions of how we come to confer moral or epistemic approbation are adequately fleshed out or defended, but, conversely, it's not clear to me that they *cannot be* fleshed out and defended. My third objection, then, cannot be considered in any way decisive against Levinson's account. Nonetheless, I felt bound to raise the issues, as any account of aesthetic experience which casts it at all in the valuing mode must distinguish aesthetic valuing from moral or intellectual valuing. So even if this objection does not fell Levinson's account, it was, I think, necessary to discuss.

What We Can Learn from Levinson's Account

There's a good deal right about Levinson's account. Aiming to develop a conception of aesthetic experience that can cover both our experiences of art as well as our experiences of nature is, I believe, the right way to go. While Levinson focuses on the pleasure of aesthetic experience, in my estimation his account is not necessarily tied to any particular aesthetic emotion, and is, as such, admirably flexible, capable of encompassing the wide variety of emotional reactions connected to our aesthetic experiences. Finally, even though I think his particular approach to it hurts his own program, I nonetheless think Levinson is right to stress the importance of connecting the non-aesthetic attributes to the aesthetic.

Under my "strict" reading, Levinson's account imposes an undue epistemic burden on the observer (as did Iseminger's). It is certainly worth noting that epistemic

constraints on aesthetic experience (a) are often tendered in service of distinguishing aesthetic experience from sensory experience (as in both Levinson and Iseminger) and (b) often result in *reductio* cases, as mentioned above and in my analysis of Iseminger's account. Certainly, this observation ought to shape our positive account, once we reach that stage.

However, even under the "loose" reading, Levinson's account shows, indirectly, how important it is to formulate a definition that will allow us to mark off aesthetic evaluations from epistemic or moral. While speaking of valuing something for itself, or intrinsically, or for its own sake, or something like that, may be enough to separate aesthetic evaluation from any number of everyday, instrumental evaluations, this criterion alone is not sufficient to distinguish aesthetic evaluation from moral or even – if we are speaking of attributions of knowledge – epistemic evaluation. Both moral and epistemic goods are believed to be valuable in themselves, so while it may be necessary to stipulate that aesthetic goods are likewise inherently valuable, it is not sufficient to mark off aesthetic experience from other kinds of experience to say that it is a matter of valuing something intrinsically.

Kendall Walton on Aesthetic Experience

In the process of developing an account of aesthetic value, Kendall Walton advances an account of aesthetic experience, inasmuch as he equates aesthetic experience with an experience of some object's aesthetic value (put very loosely).[301] As in Levinson's account, Walton leans on the distinction between "appreciation" and

[301] Walton, Kendall. "How Marvelous! Toward a Theory of Aesthetic Value." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51:3 (1993), pp. 499-510.

(in this case) "enjoyment" of a thing, and, again as with Levinson, he casts his account in terms of "pleasurable experiences." We can in fairness do no less than extend Walton the same courtesy we extended Levinson with regard to assuming that his account generalizes to other, non-pleasurable responses, though I will not bother to argue that here, as the fact of that matter is immaterial to my analysis. Walton's account is, in brief, that "[a]esthetic value… consists in a capacity to elicit in appreciators… pleasurable experiences…"[302] and that when "we take pleasure in admiring the work for whatever we admire it for, this pleasure is aesthetic."[303] In other words, to *be* stimulated by a work is to enjoy it, but to take pleasure in the fact that we are stimulated by a work is to appreciate it, which is to say that we have an experience of the work that is aesthetic.

Walton's account is very simple and, at first blush, seems to avoid most of the difficulties of Iseminger's and Levinson's accounts. Walton does not require that the appreciation be verdical, dodging the objection that sticks against Iseminger. He states that "[there] may be cases in which our aesthetic pleasure is inappropriate, and hence the thing does not possess the aesthetic value it seems to possess. A close examination or analysis of the work might convince us that it is shallow and unworthy of our appreciation, and we may then prefer not to appreciate it, not to admire it, even if such admiration would be enjoyable"[304] but follows by asserting the distinction between the experience of an object and the attribution of value: "[i]f we take

[302] *ibid*., p. 504.
[303] *ibid.*, p. 506.
[304] op. cit.

pleasure in admiring the work *for whatever we admire it for*, this pleasure is aesthetic. And if such pleasure is properly taken in the work, this constitutes the work's aesthetic value."[305] This is the very distinction Iseminger did not make. Walton insists that the pleasure taken in a work *is* aesthetic if it is pleasure taking *in* admiring it for [x], whatever [x] is and *even if [x] is not an attribute the work genuinely possesses.* If the work actually possesses the property [x] we are admiring, then being the sort of thing that has property [x], which it is appropriate to appreciate aesthetically, "constitutes the work's aesthetic value." Walton clearly indicates that one can have genuinely aesthetic experiences that are simply mistaken, which is to say that having an aesthetic experience of something is not necessarily indicative of that object's aesthetic value, because one's experience could be due, for instance, to transient factors external to the work itself (such as the lighting, one's state of mind, etc.). Iseminger, you will recall, stood firm on the notion that aesthetic experiences were experiences of genuine properties of the object in question, which was shown to be untenable.

Likewise, Walton *may*, to some extent, escape some of the problems plaguing Levinson. On my reading, the epistemic burdens imposed upon subjects by Walton's account are possibly less onerous than those laid by Levinson's, though I acknowledge this reading is not perfectly apparent. In a passage that seems to align his view more closely with Levinson's, he asserts that "[a]dmiration is paradigmatically, if not essentially, an attitude we have in part toward people," noting that while "[a]n

[305] *op. cit.*, emphasis mine

appreciator's enjoyable admiration, usually if not always, involves not only recognizing a thing's value… one's admiration also involves recognizing the creator's accomplishment, the talent and skill a person demonstrated by producing something with this value…"[306] However, he also says, at the outset of his analysis of aesthetic pleasure, that "[t]he pleasure of a hot shower… is presumably an intensional state also. One takes pleasure in something; the pleasure attaches in part to one's awareness of something. But one is not pleased by the shower… in the way I am pleased by Beethoven's C# Minor Quartet, unless one takes pleasure not only in the shower… or one's experience of it, but also in one's experience of admiring it, in one's judging it to be good."[307] While Walton does not elaborate on this observation, he appears to allow that one can appreciate even a simple experience like a hot shower if one has some kind of second-order awareness of it. That is, as long as I am conscious of something like "my, the way the warm water feels on my skin is quite nice, and isn't that just a fine thing," I could be said to be appreciating the hot shower sufficiently to qualify it as an aesthetic experience.

Now, it has been pointed out to me that "there is room to be skeptical that we tend to have such experiences of things like hot showers." This is a perfectly fair point and one with which I agree. I likewise agree with the commentator that there's some doubt as to whether we do this with art very much, either. To my mind, what Walton is describing here sounds less like appreciating an artwork, say, and more like being very satisfied with oneself for being so cultured as to be *able* to appreciate it. That said, I

[306] op. cit.
[307] *ibid.*, p. 505.

think we can put such an objection aside for the moment. While Walton's meta-appreciation may not occur as often he seems to think it does, our present question is whether such meta-appreciation would constitute an undue epistemic burden on the subject. Should it seem germane, we can return later to the question of whether Walton's account is psychologically plausible.

Whether this puts crucial distance between his account and Levinson's depends a great deal on something Walton never goes into, which is the exact nature of the subject's understanding of the relationship between the pleasure taken in the object *per se* and the pleasure taken in judging the object to be good. Earlier, I noted that Levinson argued that the relationship between the subvenient, non-aesthetic properties of the object and the aesthetic properties they underwrite must be "reflected upon," and I argued that Levinson owed us a more detailed explanation of the exact epistemic burden on the subject, lest we conclude that this criterion either rules out experiences we intuitively regard as aesthetic or, alternately, fails to rule out experiences Levinson wants to conclude are *not* aesthetic. Walton's looser formulation does not seem to require much 'reflection' at all and, indeed, he seems to believe that we can have aesthetic experiences of simple sensory pleasures, possibly (again, it's not perfectly clear) in opposition to Levinson. These two facts *seem* to put some small rhetorical space between Walton and Levinson. Under Walton's analysis, we only need take some pleasure in the fact *that* we are judging something to be good – he never insists (though he does not rule out) that we be able to articulate *how* it is we have

come to this conclusion. This is admittedly a fine distinction to be cutting, but it might save Walton from the objection along these lines that I made against Levinson.

However, whether this objection is or isn't fatal to Walton's account is ultimately immaterial, as Walton's account falls prey to a variety of the objection of psychological implausibility. This was alluded to earlier, and the objection in the form it takes here is two-fold.

In the first place, it seems that many paradigmatically aesthetic experiences are rendered non-aesthetic on this account – specifically, those which are completely absorbing to the subject, which draw the subject into appreciation of a given work of art but leave her (temporarily, at least) without a sense of self. I believe one can easily imagine being caught up in a performance of some grand, sweeping piece of music, such as Handel's *Messiah*, to the extent of not having, for a time, any inwardly-directed thoughts at all. Such a response intuitively strikes me as aesthetic, but it would not count as such under Walton's analysis. Inasmuch as the required psychological state would rule out many intuitively aesthetic experiences from being described as such, there is a whiff of implausibility to Walton's account.

I dislike condemning an account *simply* because it does not accord with my intuitions. But there is a larger problem looming for Walton's analysis; specifically, the meta-appreciation that renders one's experience aesthetic in nature is *misdirected*. The key ingredient to aesthetic experience – the meta-appreciation – is not directed at the object, but at one's self.[308] As stated earlier, this strikes me as a sort of self-

[308] Similar in a way to Iseminger's model, as was pointed out to me by a commentator.

satisfaction, not any kind of appreciation of the object, which leaves one to wonder why it is even a part of the account. Perhaps Walton made this move to distinguish aesthetic responses from the mere sensory pleasures of the sort that can be experienced even by minimally sentient beings. While this is, one supposes, a desirable goal for an analysis of the aesthetic, it seems we need more than *just* this meta-appreciation, or else we can be easily faced with situations wherein two people are having identical experiences as described from an external point-of-view but only one is having an aesthetic experience – in other words, just the sort of objection Dickie raised against disinterest theories. Indeed, Walton's account is perfectly isomorphic to a disinterest account, only instead of taking on an attitude of disinterest, in Walton's analysis, one takes on an attitude of satisfaction.

What We Can Learn from Walton's Account

Walton's account fails because it replicates the problems of earlier accounts based on disinterest. The substitution of another emotion or affective experience does not rescue the analysis – the basic structure of it is flawed.

Noël Carroll on Aesthetic Experience

Noël Carroll offers us an account of aesthetic experience that takes a tack somewhat different from the other accounts we've seen, yet one that will, in a way, bring us full circle back to Malcolm Budd's account and its particular weaknesses. Carroll's "deflationary" account is offered in "Four Concepts of Aesthetic Experience" as the only viable alternative after he has dispensed with the other three accounts

(traditional, pragmatic, and allegorical, as he identifies them).[309] He refines his case in "Aesthetic Experience Revisited"[310] and modifies his position (in response to critics) in "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience."[311] That latter modification will be of significant interest to us, but we first explicate the deflationary account, which hopes to describe aesthetic experience as experience of certain kinds of things.

In "Four Concepts of Aesthetic Experience," Carroll offers this: "[d]esign appreciation and quality detection are each disjunctively sufficient conditions for aesthetic experience."[312] "Design appreciation" is unpacked earlier as "attending to the structure or form of the artwork, taking note of how it hangs, or does not hang, together."[313] Likewise, "quality detection" is fleshed out as "an experience whose content is the response-dependent, qualitative dimension of the object…"[314] This latter is a bit more mysterious than "design appreciation," which refers to, one supposes, assessment of the formal features of a work.[315] "Quality detection" is characterized, by contrast, as "the detection of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of an artwork – noticing, for instance, the lightness and grace of a steeple, or the anguish of a verse."[316] Obviously, it's less than fully informative to cash out "aesthetic experience" in terms of "experience of aesthetic properties," even if only in part, but

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[309] Carroll, Noël. "Four Concepts of Aesthetic Experience," *Beyond Aesthetics*. Cambridge: CUP, 2001. pp. 43-4.
[310] Carroll, Noël. "Aesthetic Experience Revisited." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 42: 4 (2002). pp. 145-68.
[311] Carroll, Noël. "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70: 2 (2012). pp. 165-77.
[312] p. 60.
[313] *ibid.*, p. 59.
[314] op. cit.
[315] A reading supported by the comment, "The formalists were wrong to think that [design appreciation] is the *only* sort of thing that counts as aesthetic experience." [emphasis mine] p. 59.
[316] op. cit.

we'll set that aside for the moment. Carroll calls his account deflationary because it seeks only to identify aesthetic experience by reference to "the content of certain experience whose objects it enumerates as… the design of artworks and their aesthetic and expressive properties."[317] He justifies this particular list simply by appeal to tradition, saying that calling design appreciation and/or quality detection "aesthetic experience" "accords with a tradition of usage" and that it is "unobjectionably recognizable as correct."[318]

In a later paper, Carroll expands this list, adding that "[t]here may be further objects of aesthetic experience that might be added to this list."[319] He declines to provide any further basis for his choices than that already given, saying that "given our tradition, these are the most common, non-controversial ones."[320] He does at least acknowledge the threat of circularity in his characterization of quality-detection as a sufficient condition for aesthetic experience - "it may seem that, in conceding that aesthetic properties are response-dependent, we are saying no more than that aesthetic properties are just the properties that are picked out by aesthetic experience."[321] Carroll seems to believe, however, that this is only a problem if such properties are described in terms of some particular affective state directed toward them (such as disinterestedness) or the nature of their value (such as intrinsic value),[322] claiming that his account evades this worry by proposing that aesthetic

[317] *ibid.* p. 60.
[318] op. cit.
[319] "Aesthetic Experience Revisited," p. 164.
[320] op. cit.
[321] *ibid.* p. 166.
[322] We'll come to why he holds this in the next section.

properties could be described as "dispositions to promote impressions or effects… which emerge from the base properties of the works at hand in relation to suitably informed percipients with standard-issue human sensibilities and imaginative powers."[323] The examples amount to, in essence, saying that the aesthetic properties of visual artworks are those that are "involved in promoting the ways in which the work appears…"[324] which I have not found especially enlightening.

Critiquing Carroll's Account

The primary problem with Carroll's deflationary account is that it is uninteresting; it is more lexicology than philosophy. We are offered no reason to think that aesthetic experience consists of experiences of these objects except tradition. Obviously, this is an unsatisfying argumentative strategy, one that does little to illuminate the actual questions philosophers have about aesthetic experience. In a 2012 paper, Carroll takes note of this objection:

> In the past, I have simply enumerated these recurring objects of aesthetic experience and left it at that. Critics, however, have expressed dissatisfaction with this and demanded to know why this grouping fits together. Is this just an arbitrary list, or does it have some coherence? For if it is just a catchall inventory of what we have agreed are the objects of aesthetic experience, then, although that may be of historical interest, it is difficult to see why it should be of any theoretical interest with respect to debates in the philosophy of art.[325]

Without directly acknowledging the bite of the critique, Carroll immediately nominates a unifying feature for his list.

> "Artworks have points or purposes… The form of the work and the qualities with which it is invested are the means by which the purposes of the work are

[323] op. cit.
[324] op. cit.
[325] "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience," p. 173.

realized. In this regard, aesthetic experiences involve focus upon the *how* of the work."[326] [emphasis mine]

This modification underscores the problems in Carroll's account. One of his most prominent critiques of what he alternately calls the "traditional" or "axiological" account[327] is that it requires the subject of the aesthetic experience to actively believe the experience is valuable in itself,[328] which he allows can be nuanced to a belief (or expectation, as he puts it) that the experience *will be* valuable in itself – a move he takes to be the best answer to the objection that some aesthetic experiences are dis-valuable.[329] Both glosses require the subject to have some sense of the nature and structure of the experience, on Carroll's view, but each falls prey to a different objection. The former, he objects, fails if the subject attends to the experience with some eye toward non-intrinsic value – such as needing to be able to describe the structures of the work viewed for a class on art appreciation.[330] The latter falls prey to the use of the term "expectation," as Carroll makes the case that aesthetic experiences sometimes "force themselves on us, unexpectedly as they say…" and asking whether it is reasonable to assume any "expectation" on the part of a subject taken unawares by an aesthetic experience. [331] Both variants place an epistemic burden on the subject that Carroll thinks fatal to the account. Unfortunately, his move to save his own account also changes it in ways that I believe to be fatal. This new characterization could be interpreted to mean that there must be an *awareness* of "the *how*" of the

[326] *ibid.*, p. 174.
[327] (2001) and (2002), respectively.
[328] "Beyond Aesthetics," p. 48.
[329] "Aesthetic Experience Revisited," p. 155.
[330] "Beyond Aesthetics," pp. 48-9.
[331] "Aesthetic Experience Revisited," p. 155.

work, which would bring us to a position similar to Levinson's. Obviously, an account that requires the subject to have some cogent awareness of the manner in which the formal properties of a work give rise to the aesthetic will fall prey to the same objections already raised against Levinson's account – there's no need to rehearse them here.[332] Carroll could, however, insist that the force of this is purely descriptive: that in fact the objects of aesthetic experience are unified in this manner without requiring any further change in his account – that is, no awareness of this "how" would be required of the subject. This, unfortunately, does not save him from the main problem still lurking in his account, but rather only brings it into sharp focus.

With the clarification Carroll finally offers as to the unifying feature of his list of objects of aesthetic experience, he has given us an analysis that cannot account for aesthetic experience of the natural world. This is not to say that Carroll is unaware of the interest in providing such an account, nor that he takes himself to be offering an account that fails in this way. Indeed, prior to offering the troublesome clarification to his deflationary account, Carroll made a (brief) attempt to show how it could in fact accommodate an aesthetic of the natural world. In "Aesthetic Experience Revisited," he calls "attention to form in art work" the "analogue" of "naturalistically informed attention to the apparent teleology of natural processes and prospects."[333] Likewise, he suggests that nature has analogues to the "aesthetic and expressive properties in art works… insofar as nature often moves us feelingly or arouses us in ways that

[332] Given Carroll's examples of people who are having aesthetic experiences, it is arguably true that even his "standard," unmodified account would suffer from those objections, but that is not something we need pursue just now.
[333] p. 167.

engage our sensibilities and imagination so that we attribute aesthetic and expressive properties to it."[334]

Carroll's moves here have not helped him. His clarifying move – meant to escape the charge that his list is *ad hoc* and uninformative – ties his theory too tightly to the artistic paradigm. In the quote given above, Carroll explicitly claims that the objects of aesthetic experiences are those things that realize the "points or purposes" of artworks. This teleological analysis denies him the refuge of the "analogues" of form or expressive quality when proffering an aesthetic of nature.

In the analysis subsequent to his clarification that we are paying attention to the "how of a work" Carroll makes clear that aesthetic experience is not experience of some certain kinds of things which *happen* to be the ways that a work realizes its purposes – rather, he ties aesthetic experience *directly* to the experience of how a work realizes its aims. Regarding aesthetic experience he makes the claim that "[a]esthetic experiences are ones that batten on the ways in which the point or purposes of artworks are presented formally and qualitatively. Aesthetic experience concerns how those points and purposes are embodied and advanced."[335] This could hardly be more direct. Likewise, he goes on to claim, about aesthetic judgments, that "[o]n the basis of our aesthetic experience of the work, we determine whether the formal and/or qualitative elements of the work sustain or facilitate the point or purpose of the work."[336] The phrasing of these latter two cited comments, particularly,

[334] op. cit.
[335] *ibid.*, p. 174.
[336] op. cit.

convinces me that Carroll is not simply talking about *an aspect* of aesthetic experience, but about the defining element of it.

Now, it is possible that Carroll means here to advance a separate analysis of the aesthetics of artworks, one that is not intended to address the aesthetics of nature. If that is the case, then, by his own lights, these claims do not constitute a flaw in his theory. However, recall that we are after an aesthetic that can sweep in all aesthetic experiences: everyday aesthetic experiences, aesthetic experiences of nature, and aesthetic experiences of artworks both high and low. Thus, *for the purposes of my analysis*, we cannot "save" Carroll's account by positing that it is concerned only with an aesthetic of art – that is, by *my* lights, too narrow an ambit. In other words, if Carroll means to advance a general aesthetic, he has failed, on my reading; on the other hand, if he means to advance only an aesthetic of art, his account if too limited for me to accept it rather than advancing my own analysis.

When Carroll was just talking about, for instance, expressive properties, he – perhaps – had room to expand his account of aesthetic experience to the natural world. Even if a subject didn't think that, say, the shape of a gnarled tree was formed by some artist with the intent of expressing "sadness," it arguably true that the subject would be able to identify in it something like what artists do when they are attempting to convey sadness and thus have an experience of "pseudo-sadness." However, that is only even arguably possible if the aesthetic experience is an experience *of* the expressive property with respect to the substance of its expressiveness, not the role played *by* the expressiveness with respect to the aims of the work. In claiming that

"[a]esthetic experience concerns how [the points and purposes of a work] are embodied and advanced," he makes clear that aesthetic experience is experience *of* the role played *by* expressive properties (among other properties) first and foremost, with the substance of the property being an accident of the role it plays rather than the primary subject of the experience. That is, an aesthetic experience of "sadness" in a poem is an aesthetic experience in virtue of the fact that it is an experience of how the dolorous aspect of the poem realizes the (putative) purpose of the work, rather than just of the melancholy itself. The only hope for an aesthetic of nature in the aftermath of this amendment to Carroll's account is to approach nature as if it were created by some fictional artist for some fictive purpose, but this is not typically how we (aesthetically) approach nature. Carroll's answer to the critics of his disjunctive account causes his account to fail with regard to providing an aesthetic of the natural world.

What We Learn from Carroll

Carroll's account is instructive, though in saying that, we must note that "Carroll's account" is, in truth, two accounts – the purely disjunctive, deflationary account and the unified account of aesthetic experience as experience of "the how" of artworks. The latter fails in a way similar to Goldman's account – it cannot provide an aesthetic of nature. Little more needs be said on that matter. It is from the former that we gain the most benefit to our own program. There is a great deal of plausibility to the elements enumerated in Carroll's disjunctive account, but what is missing is some kind of unifying element, something to transform his list of objects of aesthetic

experience from mere observation into theorizing. This is a crucial element of any viable account. We have not undertaken to give an account of aesthetic experience only to enumerate the things that happen to be objects of aesthetic experience, for this tells us nothing of the nature of our quarry. In short, such a listing fails utterly as an analysis of aesthetic experience, though it may serve as a useful starting place for one.

Conclusion

Our canvass of current accounts of aesthetic experience has provided some useful examples, if only by demonstrating the ways in which accounts ventured in the logical space left after Dickie's critiques might fail. In an attempt to avoid leaning on a psychologically-implausible conception of the aesthetic attitude, the accounts we've examined here have all, in some way, attempted to define aesthetic experience in terms of the objects of experience. Goldman's account infelicitously tied aesthetic experience to the experience of art, as does Carroll's revised account. Iseminger's account does not nominate any *particular* objects of aesthetic experience, but references those objects nonetheless inasmuch as the experience must be veridical. Levinson's and Walton's accounts both try to characterize aesthetic experience in terms of attention to certain formal properties that unfortunately do not adequately distinguish aesthetic experience from certain other kinds of experience. Finally, Carroll's initial account lists some quite plausible objects of aesthetic experience but fails to offer any insight into the *nature* of aesthetic experience, making it, by definition, an inadequate analysis of the phenomenon. His revised account brings us

back to the same problem suffered by Goldman's – identifying, intentionally or not, aesthetic experience with the experience of art. Going forth, we must be careful of course to offer an account that naturally accommodates an aesthetic of nature (as argued for in Chapter One), but we must also be careful that we do not simply select *some* aspects of aesthetic experience and treat them as though they were the *defining* aspects of it (as is arguably the problem not only with Carroll's account, but also Levinson's and Walton's). Particularly, our account must be able to distinguish experiences of aesthetic value from experiences of other kinds of intrinsic value (moral and epistemic).

Chapter Four

Introduction

In this chapter, I will present my positive account of aesthetic experience and explain how it informs my definition of art, but before that, we ought to take stock of how we arrived here. In the first chapter, I argued that aesthetic experience, whatever it is, is a ubiquitous feature of the human condition, a conclusion which not only suggests we ought to have some characterization of it but which also ought shape the conception itself. In the second chapter, I rebut the idea that aesthetic experience cannot be characterized in any philosophically interesting fashion, nothing that the most telling attacks on this project fail to completely close the door on it. Having established that giving an account of aesthetic experience is both desirable (Chapter One) and possible (Chapter Two), I go on to canvass the current accounts, identifying what I take to be weaknesses in each one (Chapter Three). Thus we arrive here – persuaded of the necessity of having an account of aesthetic experience but finding none adequate, I aim to correct this deficiency by offering my own account, which will incidentally provide the basis for a definition of art, as well (Chapter Four).

Over the last two chapters, we've examined numerous accounts of aesthetic experience and considered criticisms of each. Those criticisms which proved telling constrain the shape of the positive account on offer, for it does us no good to advance a new account that can be quickly dispatched with an already-established objection. In Chapter Two, we saw in Dickie's critique of Beardsley that attempting to pick out aesthetic experience by its substantive, "internal" properties is quixotic given the

intuitive variety of available aesthetic experiences on offer in the world, so the positive account cannot rely on identifying aesthetic experience with experiences that have some particular, substantive quality like "unity." After that, we observed in Dickie's critique of aesthetic-attitude theories that attempting to describe a particular, substantive "state of mind" that is "the aesthetic" state of mind is also doomed, and for similar reasons – the sorts of attitudes we seem to adopt toward the objects of our aesthetic consideration are too varied in substance to admit of a plausible substantive definition. In Chapter Three, we examined a variety of views, with a variety of failings among them. Some failed in that they were simply psychologically implausible. Some tried to identify aesthetic experience with the experience of some particular class of thing, such as fine art, which is a sort of "externalizing" version of the same mistake seen already, the error of attempting to identify the aesthetic experience with a particular kind of substantive experience. Others could not account for *bad* aesthetic experiences, which robs us of any way to describe experiences that are clearly congruous with other (positive) aesthetic experiences but of a negative valence. Still others imposed undue epistemic burdens on the subject, requiring us to believe that of two substantively similar experiences, only the non-mistaken one is an actual aesthetic experience. Finally, while some attempted to characterize aesthetic experience as inherently valuational, they universally failed to adequately distinguish aesthetic experiences (or, in this context, the experience of aesthetic value) from the experience of moral or epistemic value.

Thus we can construct a list of desiderata for our account. It must be plausible; the subject should not be construed to be engaging in strange "mental gymnastics" in order to have an aesthetic experience. It should be formal, not substantive, as any substantive account of aesthetic experience seems doomed to "death by a thousand counter-examples." It must provide us with a way of talking about neutral or negative aesthetic experiences, since we seem, intuitively, to have such things. It must likewise afford space for *mistaken* aesthetic experiences, for similar reasons. It must not be so broadly drawn as to make it impossible to distinguish the imputation of aesthetic value from the imputation of moral or epistemic value. It must respect the ways in which we actually relate to paradigmatic aesthetic objects – i.e., art – while not being restricted to art. Finally, for reasons established in Chapter One, it must be an account that makes aesthetic experience a commonplace thing, the sort of experience that humans have all the time.

My Account of Aesthetic Experience

With these desiderata in mind, I offer my own account of aesthetic experience. It can be stated in one sentence, but it is not simple, consisting of multiple parts. I will of course unpack the characterization fully. It is as follows:

> *Aesthetic experience is (a) a second-order experience, (b) of a first-order experience as having value (even if negative or neutral), where (c) the latter experience may nor may not have, or appear to have, some further object, and that value is both (d) ultimately subjective in nature and (e) perceived by the subject as being intrinsic.*
>
> Let's examine each piece of this definition in turn.

First and most notably, *it is an experience of something as having a value attached to it* (a, b, and c). It is my suggestion that aesthetic experience is inherently valuational, though also I agree with Sherri Irvin and Jerrold Levinson that aesthetic experience is *second-order* experience, intrinsically reflective. Thus I characterize aesthetic experience as the experience *of* something as having a certain kind of value (we'll delve into the qualifiers I place on the value in a moment). Aesthetic experience is distinguished from mere pleasure, for instance, by its introspective character – I must have some awareness of the pleasurable sensation of, say, satin under my fingers and connect my pleasure with what I take to be the stimulus for it. Thus we can rule out pure stimulus-response from the realm of aesthetic experience but yet leave a great deal of room for "simple" aesthetic experiences, like the very basic experience of being aware that I do not like the color of the room I'm in. Further, because this is a formal, not substantive, characterization, there is room for positive, neutral, and bad aesthetic experiences, as well as commonplace aesthetic experiences, outré aesthetic experiences, and so on.

Likewise, it should be noted that I do not restrict the scope of the "something" in question. I can have an aesthetic experience of a simple sensory stimulation by doing no more than making some very basic value assignment to it – "I like that shade of blue." This is what I mean by "experiencing as having value," and I used the language of experience here to distinguish the aesthetic experience from a merely intellectual value assignment, even when that intellectual value assignment applies to art. So long as the response is both valuational and at all second-order, at all

reflective, it is, *ceteris paribus*, aesthetic. The experience need not be sensuous, either – I can have an aesthetic experience of an intellectual experience or perception. To wit, "I like how the author developed the character for the audience through the simple device of showing her buying a newspaper." I can even have an aesthetic experience of a hallucination or other purely idiosyncratic experience – "Wow, that was a good trip, man." In this, I follow somewhat on Saito's "anything goes" notion of aesthetic experience – any thing or part of a thing, construing "thing" in the broadest possible way, can be the object of an aesthetic experience, so long as the subject forms second-order value assignments (even in the most rudimentary of fashions) about that thing (and, of course, certain other criteria are satisfied – see below).

Second, note that it is the *experience* of something as having value (a, c). This stands opposed to what I'll call the *recognition* of something as having a value. I might be convinced through argument that justified true belief (for instance) has value, but the term I would use to describe that phenomenon is *recognizing* that justified true belief is valuable, rather than *experiencing* it as valuable. As in Iseminger's formulation, the term "experiencing" is an epistemic limiter, describing the manner in which we come to apprehend the value assignment. I do not, however, agree with Iseminger that veridical epistemic contact with some object is required – I allow that one can have a mistaken or even hallucinated experience (as does Sherri Irvin, and for similar reasons). I will expand some on this aspect of my definition later; for now, we should continue to unpack the basic characterization.

Third, note that it is the experience of something as having *intrinsic* value or, if you prefer, value-in-itself (e). I do not believe that experiencing something as having value-in-itself does or should preclude an awareness or even experience of it as having instrumental value – in this, I take a line similar to that taken by Robert Stecker.[337] Thus, my characterization of aesthetic experience as an experience of intrinsic value should withstand some of the criticisms that have told against aesthetic attitude theories (for instance).[338] Likewise, because my definition deals in the phenomenology of the value attribution, it will not matter whether we as humans *in fact* see instrumental benefit from our aesthetic experiences. But all of this will be discussed at greater length below, when we test my account with critiques both familiar and novel.

Fourth and likely most controversially, the value assignment is ultimately subjective in nature (d). The distinction I am attempting to draw is between the imputation of value that is *in fact* objective and the imputation of value that is *in fact* subjective (in a sense of the word "subjective" that I will explain below). This, I believe, is crucial to distinguishing aesthetic experience (which I take to be the experience of aesthetic value) from the experience of moral or epistemic value. There are those who will worry that this last element reduces aesthetic value to mere personal preference, while others will be concerned that aesthetic realism is somehow undermined. This stipulation is, however, one of the main differences between my position and those of

[337] Stecker, Robert. "Only Jerome: A Reply to Noël Carroll." *British Journal of Aesthetics*. 41:1, pp. 76-80. (2001)

[338] It should also be noted that, like Stecker, I think aesthetic value assignments can range from the positive to the negative – in other words, it's not necessary that an experience be a *good* one to count as aesthetic. See Stecker, Robert. "Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Value," *Philosophy Compass*, 1:1, pp. 5-6 (2006).

Gary Iseminger and Jerrold Levinson and it is, I think, vital to the success of the account. The full reason for this will become clear when we see how my account deals with certain objections that can be successfully leveled against Iseminger's and Levinson's, but first I ought to explain what I mean here by "subjective," which I am using in a very particular way. This explanation will be the subject of the next section.

Aesthetic Value as Subjective Intrinsic Value

When I describe aesthetic value as "subjective," I mean to contrast it to value that is objective in an ontologically robust way. To talk about subjective value is not to speak of what is valuable, full stop, but about what *we value*. The "we" here is used both idiosyncratically, to talk about what individuals value, and collectively/culturally, to talk about what cultures and sub-cultures value. I assign value to things based on preferences that are undoubtedly culturally-based (such as my personal instantiation of a general Western bias against atonal music), based on sub-culturally cultivated preferences (such as my love of comic books), based on purely idiosyncratic preferences (I like singers with a more raw, unrefined sound), and even based on the kind of organism I am (I prefer sounds that are in what we call harmony to those that are in what we call dissonance). None of these valuations are objective in the sense that they would hold in a universe absent of life or even humans. They are all in some sense subjective, though once we rise above the level of the idiosyncratic, they might be best called "inter-subjective."

In other words, aesthetic value under this formulation can attain a high degree of "realness," so to speak, ranging from widely held cultural values to species-wide,

"firmware-encoded" preferences. Though I believe this formulation ought to satisfy most, it will of course fail to persuade those who hold that aesthetic value is objective in the strictest sense. Although it is undoubtedly unsatisfying for both of us, I have nothing to say to those who desire such robustly objective aesthetic value. I am not persuaded by the arguments that such a characterization is needed, nor do I think it necessary to re-argue the point here.

As subjectively-imputed intrinsic value, aesthetic value is distinct from subjective instrumental value. There are many phenomena that boast subjective value of the kind under discussion here. In basketball, the value of a shot from outside the three-point line has subjective value for us (that is, we desire making such a shot) by virtue of what "point value" it possesses, that being set arbitrarily by the rules of the game. In other words, it is valued (tactically) by the players because it is stipulated to be worth three points.[339] This isn't a very interesting type of subjective value (except, I suppose, to basketball fans), but we take note of it to draw attention to how it is distinct from aesthetic value. Various artifacts and actions that have subjective value – money, point-scoring acts in games, and so on – have subjective *instrumental* value. The three-point shot in basketball is only "good" inasmuch as it contributes to winning the game. Contrast this to the subjective value of good writing – while it *can* be valued

[339] I think it's important to distinguish between the assignment of value within the game and the valuing of the thing that is assigned a game-value, as it is possible for a thing that has a given game-value assignment to be highly desirable in one situation and not at all desirable in another (that is, to have different subjective values to the players in different circumstances). For example, a certain shot might be worth 3 points according to the rules of basketball – the assignment of value within the game – but a 3-point shot might be highly valued at one point, say when one team is losing by only 2 points, or not valued at all at another point, such as when a given team is winning narrowly and would rather run out the clock than take another shot.

instrumentally (such as for providing a good example to other writers), it is characteristically valued *intrinsically*, simply as a good unto itself. I am well aware that various concerns and objections can be raised against this characterization, but I will deal with those at the same time as I deal with other objections to my account of aesthetic experience – for now, I am simply unpacking what I mean by the terms used in my definition of aesthetic experience.

Where the Value Lies

The last point I feel it necessary to clarify is where the value lies in my formulation: with the object, with the first-order experience, or with the second-order (aesthetic) experience. In order to meet some of the objections treated previously, I will need aesthetic experience to come out as valuable in itself. But does my slogan support this?

Although we tend to discuss objects as having aesthetic value ("What a lovely painting!"), I don't hold with an objective characterization of aesthetic value, so it cannot be the case that the objects themselves have the value as such – attributions of this sort must be, under my theory, "loose talk." Given that I think the value assignments are intersubjective, if the object were removed from its social context, it would cease to "have" the value in question. So it cannot be the object itself that has the value.

I've characterized aesthetic experience as experiencing some first-order experience as valuable. So in that sense, it is the first order experience that has the value. But that theory falls to the same point raised against the imputation of value to

the object – the first-order experience does not "naturally" bear the value assignment in question. So it may be that the value does not even reside in the first-order experience, not truly.

However, the second-order experience is not just an experience of value, it is the experience of valuing. The value assignment pertaining to the first-order experience resides, if you will, in the second-order experience; it has no existence outside of that experience. The experience does not just provide epistemic access to the value, it constitutes the value. Put another way, there is no beauty except in the eye of the beholder. Aesthetic experience is thus itself valuable as the only "environment" in which the value-assignments under discussion exist. My slogan, which posits that aesthetic experience is an experience that bears a value assignment, is consistent with this view of the value of aesthetic experience.

Objections Treated Previously

Any account of aesthetic experience must not only meet whatever original objections can be raised, it must also avoid those criticisms that have felled prior accounts. In this section, I will first show how my account can avoid the worries specifically raised against other accounts, then move on to consider and answer novel objections.

The "Myth-Making" Criticism

As we will recall, Dickie's criticism of Bullough's account was that it was psychologically implausible. The theory under consideration when we discussed this critique was one that described aesthetic experience as being characterized by a kind

of psychic distance, some special mode of regard that, most notably, prevents us from reacting to fictions as though they were real. We needn't re-argue the finer points of Dickie's critique of this account here, but we ought to note that his point generalizes beyond the specific case of Bullough's work. Any viable account of aesthetic experience must in the first instance be psychologically realistic – if people we commonly take to be having aesthetic experiences do not plausibly manifest the described psychological characteristics, then the theory on offer is suspect.

My account posits several psychological characteristics of subjects undergoing an aesthetic experience. First, it requires that the subject is having what I would call a simple valuational experience, and what others might call an affective experience – it may be unreflective and only "valuational" in the most basic sense. A sense of unease induced by the awful yellow color of the wallpaper, without any second-order awareness of the source of the unease, serves as an example of what I'm talking about. Second, it requires that the subject have some second-order awareness of this valuation – that is, the subject experiences something *as having* value. That is to say, the subject must have an experience of value, positive or negative, pertaining to the yellow wallpaper, to continue our example.In our example, the subject is experiencing unease because of the wallpaper, but is not *aware* of this connection, and so this does not count as an experience *of the wallpaper* as *having value*. Third and most crucially, the subject experiences this value as being intrinsic.

The first two seem mostly unproblematic. I cannot imagine anyone – even a philosopher! – would seriously contest the premise that humans have valuational

experiences, which disposes of any potential concern about the first required characteristic. The second likewise posits nothing unusual about human psychology – that we can have second-order awareness of our valuational experiences. It could perhaps be suggested that this is not plausibly a characteristic of *aesthetic* experience, and I will address this concern, but for now it is enough to note that this is not psychologically implausible as such. The third characteristic, though, poses potential concerns. Is it really the case that someone having an aesthetic experience necessarily experiences the object as having *intrinsic* value, or is that supposing a bit too much theory from the average person?

Let us first clear up what I mean here by "intrinsic." It might be worried that non-objective value cannot be "intrinsic" in any meaningful sense, because it does not truly reside "in" the valued entity. Above, I claim that an object removed from its social context (a phrase that could be glossed in several different ways, but we'll leave that for now) would cease to "have" aesthetic value, so this worry cannot be met by denying the antecedent – the value does *not* truly reside "in" the valued entity! I do, however, deny the consequent, as this is not the sense of "intrinsic" I am using. My sense of the word is just the same as that used by Kendall Walton – value that is stipulative, arbitrary, unconnected to other supposed value-assignments. He compares this notion of value, as I do, to value-assignments in a game:

> Winning is "good" in itself (from the perspective within the game), not because of its consequences; whatever constitutes winning is the object of the game.

> And the "value" of winning is independent of other values, of practical values, moral values, economic values, and so on…[340]

So my conception of "intrinsic" is articulated mainly in contrast to "instrumental." It is still "extrinsic" in the strictly ontological sense – its *existence* depends on entities other than the object putatively bearing the value assignment – but it is not extrinsic with relation to value *per se* – the value does not depend on some other value-assignment.

I do not think this is too much to require, as by requiring that the subject experience the phenomenon as having intrinsic value I mean only that (a) the subject imputes some value to the phenomenon and the nature of this value (b) is not understood as being instrumental in nature. Further, I do not maintain that the subject must have a clear, well-worked-out theoretical understanding of the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic value, but only that there is some "folk axiology" grasp of how instrumental value assignments are not the same as value assignments "just because." I think it's perfectly plausible to assert that the average person can work his or her head around the difference between the way we value paper money (i.e., it has no value in itself, but only inasmuch as it can buy us things) and the way we value (negatively, in this case) certain bad acts like murder, with the "folk axiology" holding (or so I suggest) that regardless of the consequences of the murder, it is still – in some sense – "just bad." This sort of rough distinction is enough, under my formulation, to fulfill the requirement that the subject experience the value of the phenomenon as intrinsic.

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[340] Walton, Kendall. "How Marvelous!" *Marvelous Images*. Oxford; OUP (2008). p. 20.

Given the foregoing, the stipulation does not seem implausible. I'm not asking for much in the way of axiological theorizing from those who are having aesthetic experiences, so if the reader is willing to accept that people in general can and do make the sorts of distinctions discussed above in their "folk axiology," I've done all I set out to do. Now, one might reasonably ask whether I've in fact set myself a rather low bar in this matter. Perhaps I have. However, since the differentia of aesthetic experience does not rest entirely on this one distinction, I see no harm in making this particular burden on the subject an easy one to meet.

The three psychological requirements of my account all seem plausible enough, then. With that conclusion, we can regard the objection Dickie raised against Bullough as having been met. Our work is hardly done, however.

The Parallel-Attention Objection and the Disqualifying Attention Objection

Dickie raises two objections to the Stolnitz/Vivas views that we will, for sake of their similarities, treat here together. You will recall that Stolnitz and Vivas each advanced some version of an "aesthetic state of mind" account, and Dickie's objections to these accounts both turn on the worry that someone we might intuitively take to be having an aesthetic experience will not, in fact, be having one, owing to the particularities of the accounts in question. Specifically, the first objection is to the notion that one's motive for attending to the aesthetic qualities of an object can disqualify one from having an aesthetic experience, even if one is paying attention to all the same qualities as the person who *is* having an aesthetic experience, while the second objection, slightly broader in scope, raises the worry that under these

accounts, even attending to certain features of a phenomenon can rule one out from having an aesthetic experience.

My account can answer both of these objections. My responses are informed by Robert Stecker's "Only Jerome: A Reply to Noël Carroll," which answers similar worries raised by Noël Carroll against the notion of disinterestedness as a criterion for aesthetic experience.[341] In order to explain how my account handles these objections and how Stecker's thoughts on the matter have shaped my own, I must first lay out the discussion between Stecker and Carroll.

In the piece to which Stecker responds,[342] Carroll offers a thought experiment involving two hypothetical observers of a work of art, Jerome and Charles, who are attending to all the same features of the work in question and thus having *qualitatively* the same experience (per Carroll). In the thought experiment, Jerome values the experience for itself, while Charles values it instrumentally (for the enrichment of his powers of discrimination, say). The latter attitude is taken by Carroll to be incompatible with valuing something for its own sake, which would suggest – if we take "valuing for its own sake" to be the mark of an aesthetic experience – that Charles is failing to have an aesthetic experience while having a qualitatively similar experience to Jerome, who *is* having an aesthetic experience. Carroll takes this to be a *reductio* on the notion that "valuing for its own sake" is the hallmark of aesthetic experience.

[341] Stecker, Robert. "Only Jerome: A Reply to Noël Carroll." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 41:1 (2001). pp. 76-80.
[342] Carroll, Noel. "Art and the Domain of the Aesthetic." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 40:2 (2000), pp. 191-208.

Stecker's response to this is to draw a distinction between valuing something for its own sake and *not* valuing it instrumentally, a distinction that Carroll elides. As Stecker points out, appreciating the instrumental value of an experience does not preclude appreciating the experience for itself *as well*. Of course, in response to this, one could just finesse the example and stipulate that Charles is *only* valuing the experience instrumentally. This, however, raises the point that Jerome and Charles are not, in fact, having "qualitatively similar" experiences if only one values the experience for itself, as it is reasonable to regard one's second-order experience *of* the first-order experience as part of the "total experiential package," as it were. In short, Stecker argues that if it really is the case that Charles finds *only* instrumental value in his putatively aesthetic experiences, and would happily swap them for something else that could provide the same value, then he and Jerome are *not* having substantially the same experience, thus "de-fanging" Carroll's critique.

Having set the stage by examining Stecker's reply to Carroll, let us revisit the objections at hand – that is, Dickie's objections to the Stolnitz/Vivas view. The first objection is that attending to the ostensibly aesthetic features of a phenomenon for the wrong reasons can rule out aesthetic experience. For instance, if I attend to the line work and color of a painting to determine if it is authentic, according to this objection, I am not attending to the work in a "disinterested" fashion and thus not having an aesthetic experience. The second objection is similar in form and suggests that, under accounts like those offered by Stolnitz and Vivas, attending to certain features of a phenomenon rules out aesthetic experience, again because the

experience is then not properly "disinterested." Now, even though my account does not turn on the notion of disinterest, it bears asking whether it would be possible under the formulation I'm proposing for similar results to obtain, as just such an outcome has been deemed problematic for others.

Regarding the first objection, nothing in my account requires that we consider the motives of the subject, and so I maintain that my account does not fall prey to this objection. Now, it could be the case that in the course of trying to determine the authenticity of a painting, a subject could *in fact* fail to register the aesthetic features of the work in their aesthetic capacity, rather than as markers of such-and-such provenance. I'm dubious as to whether this is actually a psychological possibility, but even if it is, it does not create a problem for my account unless we take it that merely having a non-aesthetic motive for attending to the features of some phenomenon is sufficient to prevent someone from experiencing the phenomenon in question as having value in itself. As noted above, the sense in which I am using this phrase does not set a very high bar for aesthetic experience, and so I doubt that, for instance, looking at the brush strokes of a supposed Van Gogh to determine its authenticity could so absorb one as to preclude this sort of experience. However, even if this were possible and, on some occasion, actually happened, I could happily take a Steckerian line and accept that the subject was *not* having an aesthetic experience without, I believe, jeopardizing the plausibility of my formulation.

Likewise, regarding the second objection, I do not believe that my account is in danger of failing because the subject pays attention to the wrong attributes of the

phenomenon. In the classic form of the objection, attending to, say, the effectiveness of a protest song amounts to attending to the instrumental value of the song, which, as we've seen, raises a problem for certain accounts. Again taking the Steckerian line, I can reply that noting some instrumental value of a phenomenon in no way precludes one from noting the intrinsic value of the very same attribute. Further, though, it is possible under my formulation that the political efficacy of a work of art could become valued in itself, as an aesthetic feature. In just such a way do I hope to account for the fact that it seems rational to judge a more effective piece of propaganda art as being "better" even if its aims are opposed to your own.

With these responses, I am satisfied that my account does not fall to the objections levied by Dickie against Stolnitz and Vivas. This settles accounts with Dickie, leaving us free to consider whether my formulation is vulnerable in other ways. Let us turn our attention now to Noël Carroll.

Carroll's Critique

This section treats only Carroll's critique of aesthetic theories of art (and the constituent critique of aesthetic experience) as stated in Chapter Two. Carroll has a particular critique of axiological theories of aesthetic experience, as mine might be classified, but that will be dealt with in another section, below. For now, we will continue to proceed through the critiques that have been presented in the order of their presentation.

In any case, I can dispense with this critique quite simply. Carroll's charge is that the term "aesthetic" is characterized as "attention delimited to form and

appearance." Carroll would characterize aesthetic experience as the experience of such sensual qualities rather than to any qualities requiring cognitive engagement. Carroll's objection was that this is not an accurate account of how we experience art, and his objection is well-taken. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, there's no reason to so delimit the use of the term aesthetic and many authors have articulated a broader conception of the aesthetic, so Carroll's charge fails as a general complaint against the notion of "the aesthetic."[343]

His complaint fails against my account as well. As I have stated, I do not limit my concept of "aesthetic attention" to mere attention to sensual qualities. My account easily allows for aesthetic engagement with qualities of all sorts, cognitive or otherwise. Carroll's complaint is therefore not applicable to my account.

The Aesthetic-Experience-as-Experience-of-Art Objection

As we will recall, the argument raised in the last chapter against the second formulation of Carroll's account of aesthetic experience was that it identified aesthetic experience with the experience of art. The reasons why this counts as a strike against his account were dealt with in that chapter, but in any case we need no detailed analysis to note that this is simply not a possible outcome under my formulation.

[343] My reading of Carroll is mainly based on his "deflationary account" of aesthetic experience, offered in "Four Concepts of Aesthetic Experience." Importantly, Carroll seems to divide aesthetic experiences, which are largely restricted to experiences and interpretations of the sensual qualities of a work, from "art-appropriate responses," which seem to include all responses to the non-sensual qualities of a work. Obviously, I think there's room for an account of aesthetic experience which sweeps in experiences of such qualities.

The Rare Aesthetic Experience Objection

Likewise in the last chapter we discussed Goldman's account of aesthetic experience. Goldman characterizes aesthetic experience "in terms of the simultaneous challenge and engagement of all our mental capacities… in appreciation of the relations among aspects and elements of artworks."[344] This is identified by him as experiences "of the sort prompted by fine art."[345] While this way of describing aesthetic experience seems to claim only that this engagement is a sufficiency condition (which would make sense if we take Goldman's project to be concerned with making certain that aesthetic experience *at least* includes experience of the kind of "value that all fine artworks share qua artworks"[346]), he specifically rules out certain experiences from being *aesthetic* experiences for the very reason that they are not "aesthetic experiences of the sort prompted by fine artworks."[347] As explicated in the last chapter, by this he does not mean they are aesthetic experiences but not of that particular type ("of the sort prompted by fine artworks") but rather that they are not aesthetic experiences at all. It is clear from this and supporting remarks that he treats his characterization as a necessity condition, even if he does not explicitly name it so. Even if we allow that this reading does not strictly equate aesthetic experience with the experience of art, it does mean that many common, intuitively aesthetic experiences – even experiences of many artworks! – do not qualify as aesthetic experiences as Goldman describes them.

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[344] Goldman, Alan H. "The Experiential Account of Aesthetic Value." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64:3 (Summer, 2006). p. 333.
[345] ibid.
[346] ibid.
[347] *ibid.,* p. 334

As noted in the last chapter, this strikes me as intuitively unpalatable, for reasons given both there and in the first chapter of this dissertation. To require that aesthetic experiences challenge and engage all our mental capacities sets a high bar, which (we have already established) is undesirable. Obviously, Goldman does not agree, and he need not. The question is whether my formulation sets a similarly high bar, intentionally or otherwise.

We have already discussed the three psychological characteristics of an aesthetic experience under my formulation ("The 'Myth-Making' Objection") and concluded that none set a particularly onerous burden on the putative subject of an aesthetic experience. The only qualifier left that might prove a bar to ubiquity is the requirement that the experience be "subjective," in the sense described above. The previous analysis of my use of this qualifier should make it clear, however, that such experiences are common. There is no worry, then, that my account will make aesthetic experience unacceptably rare.

The Indiscernible-Works Objection

Last chapter, in discussing what we could learn from Goldman's analysis, we encountered a critique of aesthetic experience that turned on how we assess seemingly indiscernible artworks. The objection goes roughly like so: if aesthetic experience is how we gain epistemic access to the aesthetic value of an object of consideration, then the specification of aesthetic experience must allow for us to discriminate between apparently identical works that intuitively have distinct aesthetic value (such as an original work and its forged duplicate). That is to say, aesthetic

experience must be characterized in such a way as to sweep in as *aesthetic* access to the kinds of traits that would plausibly allow us to make such discriminations. An account that cashed out aesthetic experience as, say, the experience of a sensuous surface would not be able to explain such discriminations in aesthetic value (at least as resulting from an aesthetic experience, which would be preferable).

The current question, then, is whether my account is vulnerable to a similar objection. Goldman's suggestion is that this objection can be avoided if our account of aesthetic experience is rich enough and can fold in the various cognitive experiences (such as the activation of our cultural knowledge about an object) that would allow us to make the value discriminations we intuitively need to make in the "problem" cases. As can be seen at even a glance, my account lays no restrictions on the basis for experiencing something as intrinsically valuable – that is, I may perceive an object as having intrinsic value only because, say, it has sentimental value to me, or, conversely, because it was created by someone famous. Clearly, this objection is no bar to adopting my account. On the other hand, taking this stance might give opportunity for an objection that my account is too broad. While it may be unusual to label such value "aesthetic," as will be seen, I intend the label to sweep in a great deal that is not, at current, generally given that name. Later in this chapter, I will address as best I can worries that my account takes in too much under the label of "aesthetic."

The Veridicality Objection

Gary Iseminger's account of aesthetic experience bears certain similarities to and significantly informed my own, but – as we saw in the last chapter – I nonetheless

think it is vulnerable to certain objections. Iseminger's formulation avoids many of the above-mentioned problems by specifying aesthetic experience formally rather than substantively, as my account does. As I stated previously, "[v]irtually anything *can* be perceived – experienced – and virtually any experience can be appreciated for itself." Further, this appreciation (which I have argued amounts to "aesthetic experience," in our parlance) is not described as having a particular character, such as "disinterested," "wholly engaging," or anything else that might open the account to counter-examples on substantive grounds. The account does, however, specify that the aesthetic experience must be veridical. Specifically, an aesthetic experience is, per Iseminger, having direct knowledge of something and finding the having of that direct knowledge to be valuable in its own right.

As already discussed, this raises problems. I object to the notion that one could meet all the other (intuitive) requirements of an aesthetic experience and yet fail to be having one because one is mistaken about the properties *of the object*. This is a subtle but important distinction to raising an objection about the properties *of the experience*, which strikes me as an appropriate place to make distinctions about kinds of experiences. Of course, I acknowledge that one can cogently speak of [x] experiences, where [x] is a kind of object. That is, one can have "car experiences," which is to say, various kinds of experiences of and about cars. But these experiences are united in their subject matter, only interesting as a group because they all relate to some particular thing or kind of thing. As we have already argued that aesthetic

experiences can be of pretty much anything, it does not make sense to distinguish them based on the characteristics of their objects.

Iseminger's account allows that one could be having an experience of aesthetic properties that results in an aesthetic judgment but is not an aesthetic experience, which strikes me as *prima facie* incoherent. My account allows that one could be having an experience of certain properties that results in, say, a moral judgment that one *takes to be* an aesthetic judgment, or vice versa. It's easy to see why Iseminger would have constructed his account in the way that he did. One could deny that a subject was actually having, say, a "barn experience" if he were *in fact* looking at a barn-façade, but, again, that is a distinction based on delimiting aesthetic experience by its objects, which is, *ex hypothesi*, a mistaken enterprise. A more enlightening way to look at it is to consider whether one could be having, to carry forth the analogy, a barn-judging experience when actually looking at a barn-façade. Suppose we define a "barn-judging experience" as "doing the sorts of things one does when judging the qualities of a barn," such as trying to estimate how much hay it will hold or whether or not its roof is sufficiently intact to keep out the rain. Considered this way, it's easier to see that one could, indeed, still be engaged in a barn-judging experience while not actually looking at a barn – the judgments are all based on bad information, to be sure, but that only renders them *bad* or *useless* judgments of the given type, not judgments of a different type altogether.

My account does not fall prey to this objection, as it does not distinguish aesthetic experiences by their objects. In any case, my account is a true formal account and can accommodate aesthetic experiences that are mistaken, hallucinatory, etc.

The Expert Subject Objection

In my critique of Levinson, I made several objections against him. The first is not material to our analysis, as it is obvious that I intend to include experiences of simple sensual phenomena in my account of aesthetic experience. The second objection I raise against him, however, is that it is not clear what kind of knowledge is required on the part of the subject. That is, Levinson's account seems to imply that the subject must have some kind of detailed knowledge of the relationship between the descriptive properties and the aesthetic properties of an object, but he never makes clear *how* detailed this knowledge must be or *what* details it must take in. Importantly, it is not clear whether his account requires the subject to be able to articulate some or all of the norms that link the purely descriptive properties of the object of aesthetic experience to the aesthetic properties observed, nor whether such articulations (if they are needed at all) need be *correct*. As I argued, Levinson's requirement seems to turn on his recognition that the descriptive and aesthetic properties of the object are distinct, the latter supervening on the former by means of a structure of norms (wherever we might think those norms come from). My objection to this requirement is that it's not clear to me that the average person's intuitions on such matters are clear enough to make this distinction; many will instead impute the aesthetic

properties directly to the object, as if they were a subset or special kind of the descriptive properties rather than supervening upon them.

My account does require the subject to experience something as having value, so in that sense Levinson's account and my own are of a piece. Likewise, I require that the subject experience the object as having intrinsic value, which I take to be Levinson's position as well. What separates our accounts, however, is that I do not require the subject to have any understanding of the whys and wherefores of this evaluative experience. I can be struck first by the beauty of a melody before I'm even really attending to its elements, and even once I turn my attention to it more fully, I may be unable to say anything even remotely specific about the music that I find so beautiful. My account thus not only accommodates the artistically inexpert, but also accommodates what I'll call "ineffable" aesthetic experiences, such as the experience of a particular shade of green. Absent some detailed knowledge of neuropsychology (or even given such insight!), it seems there's nothing really to say, nothing upon which to reflect, about the relationship between my aesthetic judgment of the swatch of color and its descriptive properties. Levinson's account does not allow for cases like these, while mine does.

The Indistinguishable Intrinsic Value Objection

My third objection against Levinson's account is the same as my objection against Walton's account, which is that neither account specifies aesthetic evaluation tightly enough to differentiate it from assignments of other kinds of intrinsic value, such as epistemic or moral. As I showed, Levinson's formulation of aesthetic

experience as “derived from apprehension of and reflection on the object’s individual character and content, both for itself and in relation to the structural base on which it rests” does not distinguish it from the experience of moral or epistemic value. Likewise, Walton’s account, that “aesthetic pleasure consists in pleasure taken not just in an object or person itself, but in an attitude one has toward an object or person, the attitude being either admiration or something else,” likewise fails to distinguish, for instance, aesthetic approval from moral. Both accounts attempt to specify aesthetic experience at least in part by making it a second-order phenomenon, but as moral evaluation is also a second-order experience, that alone will not serve to distinguish.

Inasmuch as my account also specifies aesthetic experience as an experience of something as having value, it, too, makes the claim that aesthetic experience is a second-order experience. However, in order to distinguish it from experiences of other kinds of intrinsic value, it also limits aesthetic experience to subjective experiences, in the sense described earlier in this chapter. That is to say, it defines aesthetic experience in terms of experiences of intrinsic value that is *in fact* (whether the subject is aware of this or not) subjectively assigned (using the term “subjectively” in the broad sense). This proviso means my account is able to distinguish between experiences of moral value and experiences of aesthetic value, but without necessarily imputing to the subject the ability to make such distinctions. Of course, this is only the case if one takes moral value assignments to be objective, rather than intersubjective – but I'll deal with that in a moment. The point here is that my account allows us to distinguish between different kinds of intrinsic values (objective v. intersubjective, in

this case). Although we have established that my account does not run afoul of the objection raised against Levinson and Walton, it bears spending a moment on this latter feature of my account to see if it is, in itself, problematic.

In my account, aesthetic experience is the experience of value that is *in fact* subjective, though this attribute of the experience is not phenomenologically apparent to the subject. Two elements of this need to be discussed: that I have chosen to assume aesthetic value is not objective and that I assert the subjective nature of the value is not apparent to the subject as a matter of course. The former we'll discuss below, but the latter we'll deal with here.

At several points in his *Art and the Aesthetic*, George Dickie expresses a concern that the "disinterest" theory of aesthetic experience does not provide a good guide for how to *have* an aesthetic experience. This worry has always struck me as an odd one – is it really a desideratum of a theory of aesthetic experience that it not merely specify what aesthetic experience is but also provide a guide for how to get them? Whether or not we take this as something a theory of aesthetic experience must do, it is arguably true that an analysis of aesthetic experience that entails subjects cannot easily distinguish aesthetic experiences from non-aesthetic experiences is undesirable to the degree that we take aesthetic experiences to be valuable. The inconvenience of such a theory would not be, in itself, a reason to overthrow it if sound, but it perhaps should spur us to apply more exacting scrutiny to said theory, to rule out the possibility that we've overlooked a more congenial alternative. That said, it is perhaps not unreasonable to look with some reticence at an

account that would make it impossible or very difficult to discern which experiences were aesthetic. That is to say, while I don't sympathize with Dickie's concern that a theory of aesthetic experience ought to suggest a method of going about having one, the related issue of whether aesthetic experiences can easily be distinguished from other experiences of intrinsic value is of some concern. There is *an* epistemic question worth pondering here, just not the one Dickie focuses on. That question, as I see it, is whether we should be concerned by the fact that one of my distinguishing attributes for aesthetic experience is not transparent to the subject.

While it is true that in my account it's not immediately obvious to the subject that she is having an aesthetic experience *solely based on the phenomenology of the experience*, I do not think this is a worry, as this fact does not impede the subject from figuring out whether the experience is aesthetic or not. The process of separating truth from beauty, as it were, is the process of discerning whether the experience is a valuation grounded in the specific physiology and history of humans[348] or something that transcends that. For instance, most formulations of epistemic value would value the same kinds of things in the same way even if there were no humans specifically or if humans were constituted quite differently or if human history had been quite different, but it is my thesis that aesthetic value systems would be different in all those cases.[349] Now, that alone is not enough to distinguish it from all other valuative experiences, but of course, the experience must also be one of intrinsic value.

[348] I am talking about humans here as shorthand, though I allow that other sentient or semi-sentient species could have aesthetic experiences. Likewise, I am here assuming, for the purposes of discussion, that moral value is an objective feature of the universe. I will deal shortly with what happens if we think it is similarly constituted as aesthetic value.

[349] I take the varied aesthetic priorities of distinct human cultures as partial evidence of this.

Combined, these conditions rule out both experiences of intrinsic value that are not dependent on the specifics of the human condition and experiences of non-intrinsic value that are so dependent, and while it is not *phenomenologically* apparent to the subject that a valuation is subjective in this fashion, this information is certainly *reflectively* accessible. Further, certain *kinds* of assessments – assessments of beauty or lack thereof, for instance – can be understood to be subjective in this sense, eliminating any future doubt as to whether they are aesthetic evaluations or not.

This answer is, I think, acceptable enough, but one might wonder why it is even needed. Why offer an analysis of the aesthetic such that an aesthetic experience is phenomenologically similar to, say, the experience of a moral or epistemic evaluation? While some previous accounts have been designed to be "neutral" with regard to the degree of reality one might wish to impute to aesthetic value, I am, in the strictest sense, an anti-realist, and further believe that analyses of aesthetic experience cannot ignore the metaphysical disposition of its objects. The subjective nature of aesthetic assessment offers a ready differentia from the experience of assessing other kinds of intrinsic value. However, it is undoubted that even aesthetic realists are, in fact, having aesthetic experiences. So this differentia could not plausibly be a necessary part of the phenomenology of aesthetic experience. But that limitation only enhances the appeal of the model to me, as it is well known that humans are bad at sorting out aesthetic approval from moral or epistemic (at a minimum).[350] In other words, I regard it as a

[350] This is known as the "halo effect" - people generally attribute positive moral and epistemic characteristics to those whom they find more aesthetically appealing. A full bibliography on this phenomenon is beyond the scope of both this essay and my expertise, but interested readers can refer

positive good that under my analysis a subject might perceive directly the similarity of the experience to moral or epistemic approval but only reflectively understand the distinction. Far from psychological myth-making, this, I think, is the truest-to-life account of the role aesthetic experience plays in human cognition, which is to say that the aesthetic judgments we render often influence and/or are confused for other, non-aesthetic judgments.

It has been pointed out to me that this claim may confuse two different phenomena: aesthetic judgments *influencing* moral judgments, on the one hand, and aesthetic judgments being *confused with* moral judgments on the other. The former is well-established in the psychology literature, but the existence of such errors may not be enough to support my characterization of non-transparency as "a positive good." The existence of errors of the second kind, however, would serve to underwrite my claim, but it is a fair argument that if errors of this type are relatively rare, we might still reasonably believe that the nature of aesthetic judgment (and, specifically, its distinctiveness from moral or epistemic judgment) is *generally* apparent to the subject. Ideal support for my position, then, would come from relatively common confusion of aesthetic judgments with, for instance, moral judgments. However, even the less-than-ideal case can serve my purpose, as I shall show.

There is little *direct* empirical evidence to support my ideal position. It is true that there are numerous psychological studies demonstrating the existence of the "halo effect," and none of which I am aware directly address the question of whether

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to the entry for "Halo Effect" in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods, Volume 1* (2004).

the individuals rendering judgments are *confusing* aesthetic responses with other kinds of judgments or simply allowing the former to influence the latter. Likewise, one can be fairly certain that the subjects studied would be able to articulate (to some degree of precision) the difference between aesthetic and other kinds of value judgments. So getting traction for my ideal case seems unlikely, but that need not be the end of the discussion.

It may be that we can use the mere existence of "halo effect" mistakes to bolster my non-transparency claim. It seems that if the nature of the aesthetic judgment were phenomenologically apparent to the subject, even attribution mistakes such as exemplified by the "halo effect" would be far less common. In other words, if a positive impression formed on the basis of, say, physical beauty had the phenomenology of being "aesthetically good" rather than just "good," one would be less likely to form mistaken positive judgments of a non-aesthetic nature. This claim, if true, makes it reasonable to infer my claim about non-transparency from the existence of common "halo effect" errors, and therefore constitutes something "close enough" to my ideal case to support my position.

Now, this claim is pure speculation, and I lack the expertise and resources to verify it empirically, but even if we are not inclined to accept it (even provisionally), there is one last refuge for my non-transparency claim. After all, it is only if we take genuine confusion between aesthetic and other kinds of value judgments at the phenomenal (not reflective) level to be *rare* that my non-transparency claim is threatened. If they are even somewhat common, that would provide some support for

my position. Now, I've already admitted that we have no positive evidence that they are *common*, but by the same token we have no positive evidence that they are *rare*, either. Lacking useful data on the subject, I believe I am entitled, at the very least, to "spot" myself this assumption, provided it has sufficient explanatory power. As we shall see, I think it does.

New Objections

Having dealt with the objections against previously mentioned accounts of aesthetic experience, I wish now to delve into objections which were (with one exception) not mentioned previously. First, I will go into Noël Carroll's assortment of objections to what he terms axiological accounts of aesthetic experience, a description that applies to my own account well enough that his concerns must be answered. Then, I will raise a worry of my own, necessarily new as it applies particularly to my account as laid out earlier, and give what I hope is a persuasive answer to it.

Carroll's Objections Against Axiological Accounts of Aesthetic Experience

We've previously dealt with Noël Carroll's critique of aesthetic experience accounts generally, detailing with broad stroke the weaknesses of several accounts current at the writing of that criticism. However, Carroll also has a specific criticism of what he refers to as axiological accounts. "The axiological approach to defining aesthetic experience," writes Carroll, "identifies it as an experience essentially valued for its own sake."[351] Carroll acknowledges that such an approach has the advantage of not attempting to identify aesthetic experience with any particular experiential

[351] Carroll, Noël. "Aesthetic Experience Revisited," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 42:2 (2002). p. 153.

phenomenology, which was shown by George Dickie to be a problematic move.[352] He also notes that such an account is broad in scope: "it does not stipulate what the pertinent experience must be an experience of, but only that, whatever that experience is of, the experience itself be intrinsically valued."[353] Although my account adds some flesh to that basic framework, mine is essentially an axiological analysis of aesthetic experience. This added nuance itself cannot save me from Carroll's critique, as he specifically targeted axiological accounts whereby the valuing of an experience for its own sake is only a *necessary* condition.[354] Therefore, it is incumbent upon me to deal with Carroll's critique of the axiological analysis of aesthetic experience.

"Carroll's critique" is actually a number of critiques, found in his "Aesthetic Experience Revisited"[355] and "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience,"[356] but the first point we must dispense with is Carroll's charge that the problems arising from axiological accounts in general are traceable to "long-standing confusion between rendering aesthetic judgments and having aesthetic experiences."[357] Though Carroll would rather separate these phenomena, my account, and axiological accounts in general, it seems, do in fact treat aesthetic experiences as aesthetic judgments.[358] I see nothing problematic in noting that there is an experience of making a judgment, as

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[352] *ibid.*, p. 154.
[353] op. cit.
[354] op. cit.
[355] British Journal of Aesthetics, 42:2 (2002). pp. 145-68.
[356] The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 70:2 (2012). pp. 166-77.
[357] *ibid.*, p. 155.
[358] Although it is of course logically possible to separate aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment (the latter being made on the basis of the former), my account cashes out aesthetic experiences as judgments of a sort, as they are experiences of something as having a particular location on the spectrum of value.

well as of the (presumably) prior experience upon which one is rendering judgment. We can say without venturing beyond the bounds of even common discourse that there is a "what it is like" to cherishing, to admiring, or to appreciating, as well as to despising, to disdaining, or to feeling quite underwhelmed by something. I propose aesthetic experience as just such experience, while the prior, judged experiences are, well, experiences of some other kind – sensual, cognitive, or what have you.[359] Though Carroll obviously disapproves of conflating these phenomena, he offers no particular argument against the practice, so this is not a criticism per se, demanding to be disarmed. Having taken note of this concern, then, I feel free to move on.

Between the critiques Carroll advances in the two papers mentioned above, he raises half a dozen substantive objections against my position. I'll examine each one in turn and finally give a summary of their damage, or lack thereof, to my account.

The first objection is that axiological accounts are valorizing accounts. If we assume that all aesthetic experiences are positive, Carroll asks "…what are we to make of unrewarding experiences of inept art…?".[360] This objection arises from Carroll's own rendering of axiological accounts as identifying aesthetic experience with an "experience valued for its own sake."[361] This objection requires, I think, that we read "valuing" as it is used here in an uncharitable fashion. Now, I have leveled a similar

[359] When I refer to the "prior, judged experiences," I am not restricting aesthetic experience to appreciation (et al) of experiences alone. I am aware that in the colloquial parlance, what is being aesthetically appreciated might be a *thing*, rather than an *experience*, but my model is best described by foregrounding the fact that we do not, indeed, interact with the thing-in-itself so much as our experience of the thing. This may be a bit pedantic, but I believe that phrasing it this way makes the structure of my account clearer.
[360] "Aesthetic Experience Revisited," p. 155.
[361] *ibid.*, p. 154.

charge against other accounts, but in such cases I have always been careful to show evidence that the account was, in fact, valorizing, and "valuing" used in the colloquial, positive sense (e.g., "I have valued my time here.") rather than in the technical sense of "assigning a value to." This is one reason I've been careful to talk of "valuational" experience, rather than "valuing," though to the extent I have used the latter locution, it is only in the technical sense. This objection thus has no force against my account.

As it happens, Carroll suggests a way out of this, but it is non-helpful, as he points out. Carroll proposes that instead of "maintaining that aesthetic experience is… a condition valued for its own sake," we could stipulate that it is, instead, a condition that we expect will be rewarding for its own sake.[362] This, of course, poses numerous problems. The problem Carroll focuses on is what we are to make of unexpected aesthetic experiences, which is to say, experiences about which we could have no present expectations. I find this a trivial point and wonder why Carroll bothered to raise it. Surely it's not problematic to cast the expectation in question as an expectation that aesthetic experiences *as a class* will be rewarding – one could have an unexpected experience, reflect that it was rewarding for its own sake, and come to classify as an aesthetic experience. This is, I think, sufficient to evade the worry raised by Carroll in this regard. To me, the more problematic issue is the source of the normativity in this situation – from whence does the expectation that aesthetic experiences will be rewarding come? Why expect an aesthetic experience to be (on Carroll's formulation) both positive and valued for its own sake? Are most of them

[362] *ibid.*, p. 155.

positive? It's a puzzle he never bothers to delve into, which is strange but ultimately immaterial, as this is an outré move to make in the first place, and, as noted above, the objection fails against my account regardless.

Carroll's next critique is that the view that aesthetic experiences are valued for themselves entails that aesthetic experiences as such can have no instrumental value at all.[363] Thus, "according to the objective version of the axiological approach, aesthetic experience as such has no beneficial consequences, either personal or social…"[364] Carroll finds this implausible. He alludes to the "vast energies… expended in securing the conditions for aesthetic experience" and claims that it "beggars the naturalistic imagination to suppose that so many sacrifices… have been made to promote experiences that have no beneficial or adaptive consequences."[365] This strikes me as a disingenuous objection – if he's taking seriously the thesis that aesthetic experiences have intrinsic value, it does not defy explanation that people would seek them out. His argument only makes sense if we suppose that resources are expended only on objects with instrumental or adaptive value, but this is *prima facie* false – humans have always wasted enormous resources on arbitrarily valuable goods. Further, humans are notoriously prone to wasting resources on goods that arguably have negative instrumental or adaptive value, on balance. Carroll's argument here amounts to ignoring, rather than engaging with, the thesis that aesthetic experiences

[363] *ibid.*, p. 156.
[364] op. cit.
[365] op. cit.

are intrinsically valuable. Thus it is that this objection, likewise, has no strength against either axiological accounts in general nor mine in specific.

Carroll goes on to address the move of claiming that aesthetic experiences as such are both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable.[366] He asks, fairly I think, what "extra explanatory work is being done by telling us that aesthetic experience is, in addition to its instrumental value, valuable objectively for its own sake?" While I think that this objection, in contrast to some previous ones offered, is a fair one, it is also easily answered. The very question of what *additional* work a stipulation of intrinsic value is doing is strange if we do not already have some *other* idea of how to differentiate aesthetic experience from other experience.[367] After all, if we do, in fact, strip away the stipulation of intrinsic value from the putative aesthetic experience, then barring any additional theorizing we are left only with an instrumentally valuable experience. That the experience is instrumentally valuable is obviously insufficient to distinguish aesthetic experiences from any other kind of experience. Experiences that are instrumentally valuable are common, perhaps even ubiquitous. Why not suppose that the distinguishing feature of aesthetic experiences just is that they are *also* intrinsically valuable, over and above their instrumental (or other) value? In any case, the objection is a weak one. If we think something actually has some characteristic, we are in need of no further justification for imputing that characteristic to the thing – it doesn't have to do any "explanatory" work.

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[366] *ibid.*, p. 158.

[367] Of course, Carroll *does* have such an idea, but his proposed differentia is dialectically *posterior* to the point at hand. That is, at the point in the discussion when Carroll raises the question of what work is done by the additional stipulation of intrinsic value, no other differentia is on the table, so it *does* serve a purpose. I discuss this in more detail in the next paragraph.

Taking his objection here to have bite, however, Carroll then addresses the question of whether the axiologist might propose that aesthetic experience is valued for its own sake subjectively, rather than objectively.[368] "That is, the objective facts… are not relevant, so long as the percipient believes that the relevant experience is valuable for its own sake."[369] This approach, he suggests, fails because it is plausible that someone is attending to all the features we might consider aesthetic features of a work without having an aesthetic experience because she believes that the experience is instrumentally valuable, whether this is true or not. Note that this rebuttal requires changing the position from where it last stood in two ways, however – it requires stipulating that the experience is valued for its own sake subjectively rather than objectively *and* requiring that we go back to the claim that an aesthetic experience is valued only for its own sake, rather than also for its own sake. Undoubtedly, this is because Carroll takes himself to have refuted that nuance on the original position, but as I have argued, his reply lacks bite, leaving open the combined position – that the experience is valued for its own sake subjectively and not necessarily valued only for its own sake. Carroll has nothing to say about this position, obviously, but since his rebuke of the latter half of the formulation fails (on my reading) and his answer to the former half of it depends upon one's interlocutor not being able to avail his or her self of some stipulation similar to that found in the latter half, I must conclude he presently has no viable objection to this move.

[368] *ibid.*, p. 159.
[369] op. cit.

Let us sum up Carroll's objections here: he objects that the analysis of aesthetic experience as experience valued for its own sake is valorizing; he objects that it is implausible that people would expend so much energy on seeking out aesthetic experiences if they were in fact "merely" valuable for their own sake; he objects that adding the caveat that aesthetic experiences either are or can be also valuable in some other way makes the stipulation of intrinsic value superfluous; and he objects that if aesthetic experience is construed as subjectively valuable, it would run afoul of examples of subjects who regard an experience as non-intrinsically valuable but who are intuitively still having aesthetic experiences. The first objection is both trivial and uncharitable, avoided easily by construing the use of the word "value" in the technical rather than colloquial sense. The second simply fails to engage with the opposing point and treat seriously the imputation of intrinsic value. The third is not decisive; though he does not mention this move, it is open to Carroll's interlocutor to suggest that the very addition of intrinsic value over and above any other kind is what defines aesthetic experience, not only defusing but actually inverting his objection. The fourth, as noted, depends upon the force of the third objection, which fails, so it fails as well.

In his "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience" (2012), Carroll updates his critiques of the axiological approach by engaging directly with Gary Iseminger's account. I have already given my own critique of Iseminger, but Carroll's criticisms are distinct from mine, and as my account bears certain features in common with Iseminger's, we are obligated to examine these particular objections to see if they also affect my own analysis.

Carroll first asks what positive reason there is to accept the intrinsic value analysis.[370] He allows that it might be "motivated as the best generalization we can propose for why certain modes of engaging artworks appear mistaken…," but insists that there other "equally effective, if not more effective, ways to disallow these cases." This would be a significant point if it were not for the fact that the particular way to disallow such cases that Carroll chooses to cite is specific to art. "One may discount these modes of engagement on the grounds that they are not focused on the appropriate features of the work qua work of art…"[371] Obviously, we needn't rehash the entire argument as to why a proper analysis of aesthetic experience must be able to reach beyond the realm of art; it is enough to note that Carroll boxes himself into an uncomfortable dialectical corner with this move. Even if he had chosen a less obviously-art-centric phrasing of his point, such as "they are not focused on the aesthetic features of the object," this reply would be rendered untenable by our prior observations that any aspect of any thing is potentially the object of an aesthetic experience.[372] In other words, this move cannot work: the proponent of it either winds up restricting talk of aesthetic experience to the world of art, which we have already discarded, or makes a claim so general as to be uninformative. Carroll chose the former. This does not mean, of course, that it's impossible that there are equally or more effective ways to disallow such cases, but at current Carroll has given us at least

[370] "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience," p. 166.

[371] *ibid.*, p. 166.

[372] A point made in Chapter 1, in discussion of Saito's account of quotidian aesthetic experience. It is necessarily a feature of my account that one can have an aesthetic experience of any object, part of an

a weak positive motivation for accepting the intrinsic value analysis ("the best generalization we can propose for why certain modes of engaging artworks appear mistaken") and no countervailing reason to reject it, so we are left with at least some motivation to move in that direction.

After this, Carroll repeats again that a "problem with the valuing approach is that it seems to imply that aesthetic experiences are always positive."[373] There is, of course, no need to read Iseminger's or my own account in this fashion, as has been discussed.

In his final objections against axiological accounts such as mine, Carroll then raises a familiar objection: the account is not instructive as to how one might go about having an aesthetic experience.[374] This strikes me as an odd objection, as noted before. On the one hand, why think that an account of aesthetic experience should be prescriptive in this fashion at all? Especially in the case of my own analysis, where aesthetic experiences are construed as subjectively valuable, it is surely the case that no general advice can be given by the broader account – specifics of local aesthetic value-matrices will vary from place to place and era to era. Tradition and intuition will serve to instruct students on this matter. In any case, this has been covered previously in the chapter, so there's no need to rehash that discussion here.

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object, phenomenon, or internal experience, as I believe my language throughout this dissertation has consistently indicated.

[373] *ibid.*, p. 166.

[374] *ibid.*, p. 167.

So, in addition to his four original criticisms, which I feel that I've turned aside, Carroll has offered two additional criticisms: that there's no explanatory reason for adding the stipulation that aesthetic experience is intrinsically valuable; and that the axiological account offers no guidance on how to go about *having* an aesthetic experience. The latter objection misses the point that an axiological account is a highly abstract account and – in my formulation, at least – allows that the substantive details of particular classes or kinds of aesthetic experiences will be filled in by culture, tradition, and so on. That is to say, there is no reason to expect that an axiological account of the sort I've offered *would* offer any guidance on how to go about having an aesthetic experience. The former objection, by contrast, seems to ignore the fact that there is no need to justify qualifying aesthetic experience as intrinsically valuable if we actually believe it is.[375] Now, it may be that there are no positive arguments for thinking that aesthetic experience is, in fact, intrinsically valuable, but that's not how Carroll phrases the objection. Lacking an adequate objection against this characterization, strong intuitive appeal should suffice to support retaining this essential attribute of the axiological analysis of aesthetic experience.

The "Aesthetics All the Way Down" Worry

The final concern I will consider in this chapter is one specific to my own account, though it is similar in nature to the Indistinguishable Intrinsic Value Objection, detailed above. Although my account can turn aside this objection, it is vulnerable to

[375] That is to say, if we stipulate that intrinsically valuable experience that bear certain other differentia are going to be called "aesthetic experiences," we need not justify this choice any more than we justify any other appellation.

another, closely related complaint, to wit: if one is a moral subjectivist as well as a subscriber to my analysis of aesthetic experience, is not one bound to admit that moral values are just a sort of aesthetic value, and can such a conclusion be considered a problem for my account? It seems obvious that many will wish to maintain the separateness of aesthetic and moral value; such a conclusion appears to threaten this intuition. So I seem bound to answer two questions: first, is there any way, under my account, to avoid conflating the aesthetic and moral; and, second, if not, can this be considered a fatal objection?

In answer to the first question, the most obvious way to avoid conflating the aesthetic and the moral under my account is to be a moral realist. However, this will not always be an option, for reasons having nothing to do with any particular account of aesthetic experience, mine or otherwise. Now, my account would almost certainly prove no problem for the moral noncognitivist, as I assume aesthetic evaluation is a cognitive process. Likewise, my account is compatible with moral error theory. If there are no actual moral values of which one may have experiences, there's no confusion to be had. Problems arise only if one is a moral subjectivist. Because, in my analysis, the subjectivity of the experience is considered from the external perspective, rather than simply what is accessible to the subject, it seems there is no room to cut fine distinctions about whether the moral valuations appear *to the subject* to be objective in nature – if one believes that moral value is subjective in nature, then all moral evaluative experiences turn out to be aesthetic experiences.

This is a bullet I will bite: to the extent that moral values are subjective (in the broad sense), then, all else being equal, I am content to argue that they are just "aesthetic" values (or, more precisely, a subset thereof). This does not mean there is no room for the subjectivist to cleave distinctions between the moral and the aesthetic, which can be accomplished by means of distinguishing between those moral-subjectivist accounts that deal in terms of "happiness" and those that deal in terms of (for lack of a better generalization) "flourishing." For instance, the violation of certain social mores might count as "mere" aesthetic transgressions up to the point at which they actually cause harm to others due to the psychological ramifications of the violation in question, at which point they might be considered moral trespasses (as they now actually interfere with some people's flourishing, as opposed to simply their happiness). Moral-subjectivist accounts that cast in the role of "the good" something that is preferred by humans – and which, importantly, use that preference as the explanation for why this particular thing counts as "the good" – ultimately ground morality in human desire. The most obvious example of this is classic utilitarianism; I would contend that the human preference for happiness is an aesthetic preference.376 Recall that my account construes "subjectivity" in the broadest possible terms, meaning that even if humans are just naturally fitted to prefer

[376] Though Mill distinguished between moral, prudential, and aesthetic preferences, his differentiation of these does not map onto either my account or any other modern account of aesthetic value that springs to mind. Conversely, the notion of happiness employed by the classical utilitarian writers, going back to the seeds of their discourse in Hume, is of something that "gives us pleasure, regardless of whether or not it appeals to self-interest." (Rosen, Frederick. *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill*. 2003. p. 34) Without engaging in a broader discussion of whether the utilitarian notion of "happiness" really tracks with my account of positive aesthetic experience – as it is ultimately a side-issue – it is my conviction that it does. If not, however, there's substantive damage to my account; it just means I'm less connected to a historical tradition than I had thought.

happiness, said preference would still count as aesthetic. Far from being a liability, I believe this interpretation comports well with the traditional objections to classic utilitarianism, as I take it that to some extent these common complaints are charging precisely that classic utilitarianism substitutes the satisfaction of aesthetic desires for the fulfillment of moral obligations. Conversely, accounts that cash out "the good" as that which in fact promotes human flourishing (typically meaning health, well-being, and so on) give an instrumental account of the good, which means that the value of "the good" under this analysis is not instrinsic, and thus any valuation experience of "the good" under such an account does not qualify as aesthetic (though the ultimate goods in this analysis are still preferred on an aesthetic basis, under my account). It is a fine hair to split, but, I think, an appropriate one.

Summation

I have, in this chapter, explained my account of aesthetic experience, shown how it resists objections made against prior accounts, and defended it against novel objections. Though my account is unusual, it can capture everything from naïve and simple aesthetic experiences ("I like that shade of blue") to complex and nuanced ones ("The lengthy passages describing in detail the mundane aspects of the lives of Stephen King's protagonists serve to sharpen the contrast between the mundane and the fantastical, intensifying the *frisson* of horror when the latter intrudes upon the former"). It does not require us to attempt an awkward fit of the language of art to describe the aesthetics of nature, nor is it bound to any particular cultural tradition. It is a content-neutral account that nonetheless allows us to distinguish between simple

sensual experiences and genuine aesthetic experiences,[377] the former being transmuted into the latter by the second-order operation of judgment. Indeed, because of the role played by judgment in my account, one can be said to have aesthetic experiences not only of sensual experiences, but of abstract things like ideas, arguments, concepts, and so on.

Now, it bears noting that it could be objected that ideas are not a proper object of aesthetic experiences, as they lack aesthetic qualities. The assumption that the realm of the aesthetic is limited to that which presents itself to the five senses can be traced to the very introduction of the term to philosophy, when Baumgarten defined "aesthetics" as "a science of how things are to be known by means of the senses."[378] The tradition of this usage stretches into the modern era, as can be seen (in its negation) by the fact that conceptual artists have typically described their art as "anti-aesthetic." Like Elisabeth Schellekens, I hold that conceptual art is *not* "anti-aesthetic" on the strength of the claim that putatively aesthetic properties such as "elegance" or "awkwardness," for instance, can reasonably be ascribed to non-material objects (such as mathematical formulae, chess stratagems, and so on).[379] Schellekens claims that the artistic value of conceptual works is not exhausted by "the knowledge, insight, or

[377] Given that I criticize Levinson for – apparently – making just such a distinction, this bears comment. My objection to Levinson (and others, going all the way back to Kant) is that they exclude simple sensory pleasures from the realm of aesthetic experience entirely, *even when the subject has a second-order experience of such pleasures*. While Levinson and I would agree that the mere experience of a soft fabric on the skin does not qualify as an aesthetic experience, we part company over whether my conscious approbation (or lack thereof) for this sensation counts as aesthetic: I say it does, he says it doesn't.
[378] Guyer, Paul. "The Origins of Modern Aesthetics: 1711-35." *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (2004), p. 15.
[379] Schellekens, Elisabeth. "The Aesthetic Value of Ideas," *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, Schellekens and Peter Goldie, eds. (2007), pp. 71-91

understanding that [the] artworks may generate," else "what, if anything, is there to secure a significant distinction between art on the one hand, and the ordinary proposition or statement expressing that same idea in a non-artistic context on the other hand?"[380] Rather, she suggests, there is value to be found in the *manner* in which a conceptual work presents (or even attempts to present) such insight, etc.[381] She does not restrict her claim to *art*, either, nothing that "the suggestion that an idea or intellectual process may have aesthetic qualities seems relatively uncontroversial."[382]

As an example of the ascription of aesthetic qualities to ideas, we need look no further than the language used by mathematicians to discuss various mathematical ideas. Gian-Carlo Rota writes extensively of the aesthetic properties of mathematics in "The Phenomenology of Mathematical Beauty."[383] He opines that "[t]heorems, proofs, entire mathematical theories, a short step in the proof of some theorem, and definitions are at various times thought to be beautiful or ugly by some mathematician."[384] Rota and I part company on some points, but I think we agree that various terms such as "elegant," "subtle," and so on are routinely used when attempting to describe mathematical beauty, just as Schellekens suggests. Under my account, an ascription of beauty (or ugliness) to a theory depends on detecting certain such qualities, the definitions of which are culturally fixed. So when one encounters Church's axioms for proposition logic, they may strike one as "sleek" or "deft,"

[380] *ibid.*, p. 80
[381] *ibid.*, pp. 79-87
[382] *ibid.*, pp. 85
[383] *Synthese*, 111:2 (1997), pp. 171-82.
[384] *ibid.*, p. 171

especially in comparison with Russell and Whitehead's axiomatization. But while Rota takes this to be an objective evaluation, I would claim that it is rooted in a cultural preference for simplicity of design and economy of effort. It might seem puckish to wonder what a mathematician steeped in a background of Baroque design philosophy would think of Church's work, especially in comparison to the earlier, more elaborate version, but just such imaginative excursions get to the heart of what I am claiming about aesthetic properties, especially of non-material objects. The argument about the objectivity of aesthetic evaluations is not the one at hand, however; I take it that the foregoing discussion is sufficient to secure the claim that even ostensibly "non-aesthetic" objects have, by my usage, aesthetic properties.

This account has a strength and flexibility that no other account of aesthetic experience can match. It can also serve, as I shall discuss in the next section, as the basis for an aesthetic account of art. Though laying out and defending a fully detailed aestheticist definition of art is beyond the scope of this project, I believe I can, without beginning an entirely new project, felicitously sketch such an account and show how my analysis of aesthetic experience can serve to underwrite it.

An Aesthetic Account of Art

A full discussion of the issues pertinent to advancing an aesthetic account of art could fill a dissertation on its own. Obviously, then, I will not be entering into an exhaustive treatment of these issues. However, I will offer a general sketch of how my account can be used to underwrite such an account. Such a sketch has value in that it

can serve as a starting point for a more involved analysis of the issue at some point in the future.

An aesthetic account of art, as has been noted before, is one that defines art in terms of aesthetic experience. Such accounts are also called "aestheticist" accounts. Accounts of this nature vary in specific detail. Gary Iseminger describes "traditional" aestheticist accounts as advancing the claim that "a work of art should be valued for those of its properties, often chiefly formal ones, that were revealed in an intense experience of the work itself, as distinct from any useful function it might perform or any moral, political, or religious values it might express or embody."[385] That is, a work of art's value *qua* art comes from having properties that produce aesthetic experiences. Dewey, in *Art as Experience*, expresses a different approach when he says art does not *lead* to an experience, it "constitutes one"[386] – in other words, the work *is* the experience brought about by some object, rather than the object itself *per se*.[387] Dorothy Walsh threads a path between these two conceptions by defending a conception of art that assumes it has "objectivity which transcends mere phenomenal objectivity," or, in other words, the aesthetic object is distinct from but embodied by some object *simpliciter,* and no object that does not embody an aesthetic object can be an artwork.[388] That is, "there *is* such a thing as an aesthetic object which can properly be referred to as "an object" by virtue of its phenomenal objectivity," but –

[385] Iseminger, Gary. The Aesthetic Function of Art. p. 4.
[386] p. 85.
[387] Dewey's analysis is obviously more complex than this, but the thumbnail version suffices for our rhetorical purposes here.
[388] Walsh, Dorothy. "Aesthetic Objects and Works of Art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 33:1 (1974), pp, 8-10.

per Walsh – this thing only becomes art when one has an aesthetic experience of it in its proper artistic context, so that the work as such is in some sense the concrete thing but only when one is having what Walsh would call the right kind of aesthetic experience of it.[389] Regardless of nuance, though, all agree that artworks (whatever particular ontological nature they may exhibit) are fundamentally things that are responsible for aesthetic experiences.

Features of an Aestheticist Account

There are, of course, non-artworks which are responsible for aesthetic experiences, so one hopes that there is more we can say about aestheticist accounts generally speaking. Nick Zangwill suggests that all aesthetic theories of art have two components. The first is "the claim that it is the function [,determined in part by the maker's intentions,] of art to have certain aesthetic properties in virtue of certain nonaesthetic properties." The second component is an account of aesthetic properties, whatever the particular account happens to be.[390] The latter element of this formulation is presently of less importance to us than the former. Whatever the details of any given account of aesthetic properties and how they come to arise from the nonaesthetic, there is a great deal to unpack in the phrase "it is the function… of art to have certain aesthetic properties."[391] How any particular aestheticist account

[389] *Ibid.* p. 12.
[390] Zangwill, Nick. "Are There Counterexamples to Aesthetic Theories of Art?" The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 60:2 (2002), p. 111
[391] Careful readers will note that in repeating what I take to be the key element of this definition, I leave out Zangwill's stipulation that this function is determined "in part by the maker's intentions." This is not an accident, as we shall see.

unpacks that phrase will go a long way toward determining the plausibility of said account.

James C. Anderson provides us with a further aspect of accounts of art that bears noting before I give my own account. "The first, and most obvious, requirement of any employment of the concept of the aesthetic [to define art] is to distinguish works of art from objects in nature which exhibit aesthetic properties and provide opportunities for aesthetic appreciation."[392] Anderson claims this is best accomplished by claiming that "works of art, unlike natural objects, are artifacts."[393] He notes this claim has "wide acceptance across various accounts of the nature of art," and that the "basic insight" of such a claim is "that all works of art are intentionally produced." He further notes that the claim is "ambiguous in at least three ways." The first thing it might mean is that "if someone makes a work of art, then she was intentionally making a work of art." The second is that "there is a specific intention common to all artworks though that intention does not necessarily include, as part of its content, the concept of art." Such would be the case if all works of art were "intended to be artifacts which are expressive or beautiful or representative of reality." Finally, it could mean that "if someone makes an artwork then she was intentionally making something or other and, for reasons independent of the content of her intention, the artifact turned out to be an artwork."[394]

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[392] Anderson, James C. "Aesthetic Concepts of Art." in *Theories of Art Today*, Noël Carroll (ed.), Madison: University of Wisconsin Press (2000). p. 78
[393] op. cit.
[394] op. cit.

Regarding the first way of cashing out the insight that works of art are intentionally produced, Anderson argues that the first is unworkable, as it is circular. We cannot non-vacuously define *x* by asserting that it is just the result of an *x*-making process. Anderson notes that Monroe Beardsley employs the second strategy, defining art as an object created with the intention of it being appreciated aesthetically.[395] He likewise claims that Richard Lind employs the third strategy, defining art as something that is an artifact and functions to provide for aesthetic appreciation.[396] Anderson believes that both the functionalist and the intentionalist accounts have something to offer and that they should be used in tandem, to provide two different ways of understanding art as a kind.[397]

So far, this leaves us dividing workable aestheticist accounts of art into two kinds – functional and intentionalist – and observing that accounts in either category have three features: the claim of artifactuality; some account of aesthetic properties; and some claim about the role these aesthetic properties play in making the artifact into art. There remains, however, one important account to discuss, one which stands only partially in the intentionalist category: Jerrold Levinson's intentional-historical account of art, which – he hopes – avoids the pitfalls of intentionalism by wedding it to elements of an altogether different sort of theory of art. First proposed in his "Defining

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[395] *Ibid.*, p. 79

[396] *Ibid.,* pp. 79-80, referring to Lind's "The Aesthetic Essence of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 50:2 (1992), pp. 117-129. His characterization seems fair on my reading of Lind.

[397] *ibid.*, pp. 65-6

Art Historically"[398] and defended and refined in "Refining Art Historically"[399] and "Extending Art Historically,"[400] Levinson's account proposes to advance "the most general concept of art that we have now, one that seems adequate to the art of today, but can also be seen to comprehend… all the art of our past…"[401] Levinson does not wish to rely on a purely intentionalist account for some of the reasons mentioned above in Anderson's criticism of other intentionalist accounts, but also because of the simple observation that "[i]f one reflects on the varieties of art and art-making in the past half-century, one cannot help but be struck by the fact that, intrinsically speaking, there are simply no holds barred."[402] Now, Levinson here also means to say that there are no intrinsic features common to all artworks, full stop. But, salient to our present concern, he is of course also asserting (*a fortiori*) that there is no one intention or kind of intention behind the production of all things we call "art."

So, with that in mind, Levinson offers his intentional-historical account, wherein "to be art is, roughly, to be an object connected in a particular manner, in the intention of a maker or profferer, with *preceding* art or art-regards…"[403] In other words, Levinson proposes that creating something with intentions that are connected in the right way to the stuff *already* recognized as art is enough to make the new thing in question also "art." In this manner, we can invoke a sort of Wittgensteinian "family resemblance" thinking to explain how it is that the creators of art in the very earliest

[398] British Journal of Aesthetics 19:3 (1979), pp. 232-250.
[399] The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 47:1 (1989), pp. 21-33.
[400] The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 51:3 (1993), pp. 411-423.
[401] *Ibid*., p. 411.
[402] "Refining Art Historically," p. 22.
[403] "Extending Art Historically," p. 411.

human civilizations might still be said to be "doing the same thing," broadly speaking (i.e., creating art) as artists of today, even though the substance of their intentions might be (putatively) very different indeed. Though the concept of art has undergone "drift" over the millennia of human existence, there is a common thread that can be traced from the present day to the dawn of history. As Levinson puts it:

> My claim is that when the most unlikely things are offered by current day performance artists, photographic appropriationists, musical paradoxicalists, literary anarchists, and the rest, and when Picasso offers his Demoiselles d'Avignon, Beethoven his Eroica Symphony, Sappho her odes and the ancient Egyptians their hieratic murals, there is something common in what is going on in these cases which allows us to recognize all the upshots as art from our current perspective, despite the fact that a lot is going on which differentiates them, and despite the fact that the concepts of art prevailing at those various times are by no means the same, and in some cases – the earlier ones – may even be absent.404

Levinson does not employ a functionalist account of art because he does not think there is a single common function to all art, but he likewise does not think that there is any single *substantive* common intention that underlies the creation of everything we call art, so he cannot employ the strategy of claiming that "an artwork is something created to be an artwork," where the definition of "intending to create art" has some particular, determined content. He nuances this by alloying his intentionalism with a kind of historicism, effectively rendering the claim as follows: an artwork is something created to be an artwork or similar to other artworks *as that term was understood at the time*. In his own words: "the agent in question intends the object for regard (treatment, assessment, reception, doing with) in some way or ways that what are acknowledged as already artworks, are or were correctly regarded or

[404] op. cit.

done with."[405] This way of describing it misses some of the subtlety of what Levinson is up to, but hopefully we have enough of an understanding of Levinson's account to be going on with.

Levinson's account does indeed sidestep all the difficulties of traditional intentionalist accounts employing Anderson's "first strategy," while not falling prey to many of the failings of purely historicist accounts such as Artworld-based definitions like Carroll's. Levinson accomplishes this feat by creating a kind of historicism that does not "appeal to the social, political and economic structures that surround the making of art at different times – including those which are denoted by the label 'the Artworld' – which seems too contingent and tangential for the purpose at hand, and arguably absent or only minimally present…"[406] That said, Anderson raises a concern about his account that, to my mind, Levinson does not adequately answer: "Levinson relates works from the past and present to ur-works, which are stipulated to be works of art. Of such a definition, it seems a fair question to ask what makes ur-artworks, artworks."[407]

Levinson's problem here is just a regress problem so familiar to foundationalist accounts of knowledge. If artwork(*n*) is an artwork in virtue of its connection to prior work artwork(*n*-1), and artwork(*n*-1) is an artwork in virtue of its connection to prior work artwork(*n*-2), etc., eventually one arrives at what is putatively artwork(*n*-*x*),

[405] op. cit.
[406] op. cit..
[407] "Aesthetic Concepts of Art," f. 16, p.88.

before which there is… what, exactly? Levinson anchors this regress in the *ur*-arts.[408] Though he originally suggested we merely stipulate that these practices be called "artworks," in order to ground our regress, he later revised his position, because, it seems, he was dissatisfied with the arbitrariness of this approach.[409] Although he does capture the fact that there is no particular mode of regard common to all artworks, much less to the *ur*-arts, his revised stance, however, fails to resolve the basic problem with his account.

"In order to stop this regress," Levinson offers, "it seems that one of two concessions must be made. The first would be to finally grant objects of the *ur*-arts the status of art, but admit that they are so… not because modeled on *earlier* art, but rather because *later*, unquestioned, art has sprung from them.[410] The second would be to keep objects of the *ur*-arts as non-art, but then to acknowledge that products of the *first* arts… are art in a sense close to but not identical to that applying to all else subsequently accountable as art…"[411] Neither answer is at all satisfying, leaving us with a regress problem that, in itself, constitutes grounds for rejecting Levinson's hybrid account. Levinson's second concession is, of course, just moving the stipulation "up" one rung on the ladder of regression – instead of stipulating that the *ur*-arts have status as artworks, we stipulate that the *ur*-arts-plus-one-iteration are the things that have status as artworks. The added wrinkle does not make the move less problematic.

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[408] "Extending Art Historically," p. 421. I use Levinson's later, rather than his original, paper on this in the spirit of charity, as it represents, as we shall see, his more fully considered positions on his account.
[409] op. cit.
[410] In my analysis, whether Levinson bases the extension of art status to the *ur*-arts on their historical connection to present arts or on the fact that they share modes of regard with "unquestioned" artworks is irrelevant, as I shall show.
[411] *Ibid.*, pp. 421-2.

And his first is not only unconscionable boot-strapping – by what right to we call the later objects "art" at all, much less "unquestioned" art, if we cannot secure the provenance by which Levinson himself suggests they are due this name? – it reduces art to exactly the sort of thing Levinson was trying to avoid: an arbitrarily stipulated phenomenon. Why are the cave paintings what we stipulate as being "art," rather than the gnawed bones or chips of flint or frankly anything found in these ancient caves? Levinson would answer that it is because what we now call "art" shares certain modes of regard with the cave paintings, but this misses the force of my objection. Things gnawed upon by modern people – pencils, fingernails, etc. – share a "mode of regard" (using the phrase a bit facetiously, perhaps) with the gnawed bones in those caves, so why not call those former things "schmart" and the latter "*ur*-schmart?" I do not contend that Levinson has failed to establish a connection between what we now call art and what he calls *ur*-art; I object that the distinction is both *post hoc* and, in the form he presents it, devoid of meaningful content. In order to explain why certain things are now grouped together under the rubric of "art," he turns his whole account upside-down and reverses the flow of justification to secure a starting point. He does not offer an account of what makes art distinctive so much as a mere description of how art-objects are historically related to each other and to some stuff that he arbitrarily deems to be non-art (because to call it art would cause problems for his program). Levinson's account, while admirably novel, cannot resolve the problems of intentionalist accounts of art.

So it is that my account is not an intentionalist one, but rather one which can be understood broadly as a kind of functional account that is similar to Richard Lind's. It reiterates the claim to artifactuality, albeit with some nuance as to how "artifactuality" is to be understood. Most of the philosophically interesting aspects of my account are found in these two aspects, as the account of aesthetic properties I utilize simply falls out of my account of aesthetic experience. Put more pointedly, my claim is that something is a work of art if it is an artifact and its primary cultural role is to be evaluated aesthetically. I will unpack this formulation a bit below.

Unpacking My Account

Let's start with the second part of my conjunctive account: "[the object's] primary cultural role is to be evaluated aesthetically." Richard Lind offers a very similar locution when he claims that something is a work of art if it is an artifact and it functions to provide for aesthetic appreciation.[412] Note that Lind's account describes the function in strictly objective, rather than culturally-constructed, terms. He specifically defines "function" as "the *immediate* purpose its maker intended it to serve…," which renders the function of the artifact in question invariant across contexts.[413] My account employs the culturally-constructed phrasing in order to avoid difficulties that crop up with Lind's objective phrasing. Anderson notes these difficulties with two examples. The first is of a paper that is so well written that "it rises to the level of functioning to provide aesthetic appreciation."[414] Anderson suggests the

[412] "Aesthetic Concepts of Art," p. 80

[413] "The Aesthetic Essence of Art," p. 124

[414] *ibid.*, pp. 83-4

claim that "we should conclude that this philosophical essay is a work of art" is a *reductio* on accounts like Lind's. He takes note of Lind's "attempts to avoid this consequence by distinguishing 'primary' from 'secondary' functions of artifacts," arguing that the principal function of artworks is to deliver aesthetic appreciation, but claims that move fails to rescue the account. To show why, he offers the example of an advertisement that is so ineffective that it fails in its primary purpose of motivating sales, leaving its "(alleged) secondary function [to] become its principal function," where this secondary function is taken to be provision of aesthetic appreciation. "Thus the failed advertisement 'becomes' a work of art *because of its failure to be an effective advertisement.*" [emphasis original] Anderson likewise takes this to be an unacceptable consequence of Lind's account. [415]

The problem with Lind's account, according to Anderson's analysis, is that it seems to assume that if something does not function *well*, that function cannot be its primary function.[416] Whether Anderson is correct in his analysis of function (specifically, in assuming that if something fails to function well in some way *x*, that *x* cannot be its primary function), his broader point is well-taken: it is wrong to say that all art invites aesthetic appreciation, if we take "appreciation" here to have any kind of positive connotation (as Lind clearly does). This leads to yet another account of art where only good art qualifies. Setting aside for a moment the condition of artifactuality, pinning art-status to the actual function *performed* by the object in question will always result in such a valorizing account, as only successful objects –

[415] *ibid.*, p. 84

[416] My thanks to Sherri Irvin for the specific phrasing of this point.

whatever it is they are supposed to do – will qualify. So we should avoid accounts that speak in terms of function actually performed.

Thus do I cast my account in terms of *culturally imputed* function and not *actual* function. Again setting aside the condition of artifactuality, artworks are things the cultural function of which is to be the object of aesthetic evaluation. Now, obviously, one would prefer that such objects yield positive aesthetic evaluations, given our assumption that aesthetic evaluations just are aesthetic experiences. In other words, given that making an aesthetic evaluation is necessarily a phenomenologically substantive experience, rather than a "dispassionate" one, there's a stake in desiring that the these objects be aesthetically good. However, as we know there are many failures, this nonetheless allows for objects that are not in practice enshrined for aesthetic appreciation, but are nonetheless objects such that the primary standard of evaluating them is aesthetic. My account thereby avoids the problems that plague Lind's account.[417]

Of course, the very features that allow my account to avoid the problems outlined above raise the question of how we identify culturally imputed function in the first place. As has been pointed out to me, cultures are not monolithic, and different communities or even individuals may impute different functions to the same object. Rather than a defect of my account, I regard the variability of the application of the term "art" to be a good-making feature, accurately capturing the "culture wars" over

[417] Obviously, we are then faced with the question of how to discern which objects have this culturally-imputed function. That is a separate question from the one I address here, but I assume the problem is not intractable, just as it not an insoluble problem to figure out which objects belong to *any* culturally-created category (borderline cases notwithstanding).

avant-garde art. The cry of "that's not art!" – hotly uttered by the *hoi polloi* when encountering everything from Pollock's action paintings to Karen Finley's performance pieces – is, in my analysis, both right *and* wrong, and, more significantly, a signpost of the cultural divide between those who classify those objects as particular occasions for aesthetic appreciation and those who do not.

This also answers the question of whether the status of "art" is arbitrarily conferred, under my account. In a sense it is, as many things that would make fine occasions for aesthetic appreciation may not be classified as art, in a given culture. Likewise, different cultures will certainly enshrine different things – maybe even different *sorts* of things – as "art." That said, there will assuredly be a connection between the propensity of certain objects to afford positive aesthetic experiences and their enshrinement as "art" – that is, their being held up as paradigm examples of the kinds of things we like to or ought to be appreciating aesthetically. But it must be remembered that the ability of an object to afford positive aesthetic experiences in a given cultural context depends on the specific details of that culture. Likewise, "culture" in this case is to be read liberally, embracing even sub-cultures. In other words, the definition of art in a given culture depends significantly on the kinds of things that a given culture is *capable* of finding aesthetically rewarding, and positioning something as art or even in an artistic context can be construed as a challenge to the cultural norms of aesthetic appreciation, whether polemical or persuasive.

This formulation also has two other advantages: it makes sense of the practice of calling things that are not actually artworks "works of art," in the metaphorical

sense (such as "that car is a work of art, man!"), and it provides a ready explanation for how objects that were not created to be art can "become" art. Both these advantages stem from the same properties of the account, in fact. In both my account and Lind's, a non-artwork that holds great aesthetic appeal is colloquially "a work of art" inasmuch as it draws very near to being the sort of thing that is primarily appreciated for its aesthetic qualities, whatever its original purpose. For Lind, a work of art is something that is in fact primarily appreciated for its aesthetic qualities, while for me, it is something that is culturally assigned to the role of being primarily appreciated for its aesthetic qualities, but under either definition, one can easily see how an aesthetically pleasing non-artwork could be *called* "a work of art in the metaphorical sense without actually being an artwork *per se*.[418]

My account, however, handles better cases of items that *are* now presented as art but which were not intended to be considered as such. Consider the example of a ritual mask created by some tribal peoples now on display in a Western museum.[419] It is presented as art, discussed as art, treated as art. Lind's account cannot explain how

[418] Of course, a metaphorical "work of art" that is not an artwork *per se*, such as, say, an aesthetically-pleasing automobile, can *become* a literal artwork, or at least garner treatment more like that given to a literal artwork, when it is no longer used in its original capacity. Consider certain "classic" cars that are no longer primarily used for transportation but rather displayed at auto shows and in automotive museums for the purpose of aesthetic appreciation. I would contend that these things have *become* artworks in the context of a certain subculture, even if the mainstream culture would refuse to grant them the dignity of the term.

[419] This example is intentionally problematic from a social justice standpoint. It is my contention that such objects *are* artworks in Western society, but this tells us nothing about whether Western society *ought* to go about hijacking objects from other cultures and "reducing" them to art. I think that other accounts of art obscure an important issue here. By acknowledging that there is not simple category of "art" to which objects either do or do not belong, we can open the question of what cultural contexts we are morally obligated to foreground in our regard of certain objects.

the mask has become art, however, unless it somehow *fails* at its original purpose.[420] One could, I suppose, tell a story about how the mask "fails" at its original ritual purpose because it has been removed from its ritual context, but one might also reasonably ask whether this constitutes a "failure" on the part of the piece in question. In other words, one might ask whether it is a fact about the mask that it does not primarily function as a ritual object, or just a fact about the circumstances. This question does not arise under my account. The mask is an artwork in virtue of the fact that it is culturally assigned the role of being appreciated primarily for its aesthetic properties. Now, such claims must be indexed to particular cultural contexts, but this is hardly a radical thesis: what objects are considered artworks (and what kind, for that matter) has always varied by culture. So we need not get into the question of whether the mask is effective as a ritual object, only the question of what kind of role it plays in the cultural context in which we are, in fact, encountering it. If we encounter the mask in its original cultural context, it is not an artwork as we know them. If we encounter the mask in an art museum in the Western world, it is an artwork.

[420] This is, at least, my reading of Lind's account. Sherri Irvin suggests that perhaps the function that is most fully satisfied is the primary function – i.e., "the mask might succeed at its original purpose, but succeed *even more fully* aesthetically, and thus become a work of art." While this would, itself, make the beginnings of a fair account, I do not think it is what Lind intended. He specifically intends his account to explain both good and bad art ("Aesthetic Essence," p. 125), allowing that we may dismiss an object as art if it is a *total* failure (op. cit.) at providing for aesthetic appreciation. I presume both that (a) his insistence on this point is meant to emphasize the contrast between the dismissal of objects as *x* on account of total failure to fulfill *x*-function(s) and the acceptance of objects as *x* that fulfill *x*-functions at all, even badly, and (b) his reasoning about whether something is "art" is not a case of special pleading – that is, that he applies the same standard to deciding whether any given thing falls under some rubric or another. By this reasoning, he would have to accept the mask as a mask, not an artwork, so long as the mask does not *totally* fail at its primary function (whatever that would be) no matter *how well* it succeeded aesthetically.

Now, it is true that my account bears resemblances to artworld accounts, but it's crucially different. Artworld accounts of art, put extremely briefly, are accounts which posit that "the artworld" – usually taken to mean the community of those who professionally create, critique, and display art – nominates certain objects to be art. This is similar to how a person can only be a Nobel Prize winner – whatever the quality of his or her work – if a Nobel committee actually selects the individual in question for a prize. There are no objective criteria to be met; the status is conferred by a certain group of people. There are no necessary and sufficient conditions for being a Nobel Prize winner other than the approval of the Nobel Prize committee. This is distinct from, say, a particular shot being a bullseye – no one needs to "certify" a bullseye. It's either in the center of the target or it's not. There are simple necessary and sufficient conditions for being a bullseye. My account of art is similar to an artworld account inasmuch as it relies on the certification by a group – that is, unless a thing is of a kind held up by some culture primarily for aesthetic appreciation, it is not an artwork. However, the certification is not arbitrary, nor need it be explicit, nor need it be carried out by some special group. If it is a *fact* that a given culture regards this sort of thing primarily for its aesthetic qualities, whether or not any putative artworld cares or even knows about the thing in question, it is an artwork for that culture. Note that this move in some ways bears resemblance to Levinson's intentional-historical account, with the proviso that I do not believe the creator need intend for the work to be an artwork. That said, historical facts about what a given culture regards as art play a crucial role in my account, much as in Levinson's.

It is important to note that "a culture" in this context does not necessarily refer to any particular group in terms of size or composition. It is not necessary for a would-be author to distribute her short fiction into wide release so that it might secure status as an artwork. It is enough that the short fiction is, within the prerogatives of the author's culture, the sort of thing that is primarily appreciated for its aesthetic properties. This is so not because an artworld said so, but because of facts about the culture. If it were the case that an individual regarded her car primarily for its aesthetic qualities, that fact alone would not be enough to elevate the car to the status of an artwork, because the car is not *culturally* something that is regarded primarily for its aesthetic qualities.

So in my account, if it is a cultural fact that something is of a kind assessed primarily on an aesthetic basis, it is an artwork. Note that it does not have to be assessed positively. It simply needs to be the case that the primary mode of assessment for the object in question is aesthetic. We can come to appreciate different kinds of things primarily for their aesthetic properties. Duchamp's "Fountain" is an artwork in virtue of the fact that it was presented to us (and accepted by us) to be appreciated for its aesthetic properties,[421] rather than for its functional utility as a

[421] I must note forcefully, lest there be misunderstanding, that by "aesthetic properties," I do *not* mean the object's sensual properties. Duchamp denied that "Fountain" was meant to prompt aesthetic appreciation, and Arthur Danto suggests in *After the End of Art* (1997) that Duchamp's aim was "to extrude the aesthetic from the artistic" (p. 84, a reference I encountered first in Martin Seel's 1998 paper "Art as Appearance"). But, as Seel argues, Danto uses the term "aesthetic" here to mean "features of an object that can be distinguished by sensory experience" ("Art as Appearance," p. 105), and I believe Duchamp was using the phrase in something like that way, as well. Restricting the term "aesthetic" to that scope I would be willing to grant the point that "Fountain" was not meant to be appreciated aesthetically, but I am not willing to make such a restriction. I posit that the aesthetic appeal of "Fountain" is intellectual and that its relevant aesthetic properties exist precisely *because* it

waste disposal method. The fact that it was presented as part of an art showing, by a famous artist, had everything to do with why the normal cultural prerogatives about the attributes normally used to assess a urinal were overturned, but it is not an artwork in virtue of being deemed so by some "artworld" *per se*. The acceptance of the artworld plays an explanatory role in the story of why we appreciate this urinal primarily for its aesthetic properties rather than for other attributes, but it is the particular nature of our appreciation that explains the object's art-status, rather than the acceptance of the artworld as such.

In sum, in my account as in Levinson's, there is no one mode of regard that is proper to artworks – on that much we agree. *How* we regard artworks is fixed by culture or subculture as are the *particular aspects* of artworks we take to be aesthetically salient, and even the *standards* by which we evaluate them. The only common feature among the widely varied experiences of the widely varied artworks throughout human history, going all the way back to the so-called "*ur*-arts," is that all of these evaluations are, under my account, aesthetic experiences. And what makes them all art is that some culture or another, however marginalized or hegemonic, has designated that these objects are primarily for the purpose of being so evaluated.

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was a visually mundane object entered into an art show. See my earlier comments on the aesthetic properties of non-material objects.

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