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THE ROLE OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

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“We develop language in the context of looking: the metaphor of vision again”. Iris Murdoch,
‘The Idea of Perfection’.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the abiding themes of the three essays which make up Iris Murdoch’s wonderful *The Sovereignty of Good*¹ is that experience can be a way of our coming to possess aesthetic concepts. “We learn through attending to contexts, vocabulary develops through close attention to objects, and we can only understand others if we can to some extent share their [spatio-temporal and conceptual] contexts.” (IP, p.31). My interest in this paper is in what account of aesthetic experience can respect this intuition; that “close attention to objects” can play an important role in our acquisition of aesthetic knowledge and concepts. I want to suggest that certain debates in the philosophy of mind can help us consider how aesthetic experience must be structured in order to play this role.

II. AESTHETIC CONCEPTS

What might it mean to say that experience can play a role in our acquiring aesthetic concepts? Murdoch introduces the idea with the following example: “The art critic can help us if we are in the presence of the same object and if we know something about his scheme of concepts. Both contexts [spatio-temporal and conceptual] are relevant towards our ability to ‘seeing more’, towards ‘seeing what he sees’.” (IP,

¹ Murdoch (1970). I will use the following abbreviations to refer to the individual essays: ‘The Idea of Perfection’ (IP), ‘On ‘God’ and ‘Good’ (G) and ‘The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts’ (SG). All page numbers refer to the Routledge Classics edition (2001).

p.31). The conceptual context is no doubt important here: sharing a set of concepts – one might say, a particular point of view – with the art critic is necessary for her to draw our attention towards the aesthetic aspects of the common object. But given that shared context, it is the aesthetic experience – the experience of the aesthetic properties of the object of attention – which allows the art critic to draw one’s attention to the aesthetic properties of the object, and thus aid the development of one’s aesthetic vocabulary. Aesthetic experience allows us to broaden our aesthetic conceptual repertoire.²

How is this possible? We can begin to address this question by focusing on the nature of aesthetic concepts. A further prominent theme in Murdoch’s essays is that our aesthetic concepts are the concepts of things which are, in some sense, part of the world. “The value concepts are... patently tied onto the world, they are stretched as it were between truth-seeking mind and the world... [Their authority] is the authority of truth, that is of reality.” (SG, p.88). This line of Murdoch’s thought is often referred to as her rejection of the fact/ value distinction.³ But while that may be one part of Murdoch’s picture, the most basic claim here is simply that aesthetic values are themselves aspects of reality: “[a]ttention [to values] is rewarded by knowledge of reality.” (SG, p.87). By rejecting the claim that value “does not belong inside... the world of science and factual propositions”, a claim which would relegate values to “a shadowy existence” (G, p.57), Murdoch wants to leave room for an account on which aesthetic values are themselves features of the world.⁴

What follows from this about the nature of aesthetic concepts? One immediate consequence is that our aesthetic concepts are *unitary*: they cannot be ‘disentangled’ into a descriptive component, which belongs inside the world of science and factual propositions, and an evaluative component which is “attached somehow to the human will, a shadow clinging to a shadow” (G, p.57).⁵ Rather, the value itself is to be thought of as an aspect of the reality; and that means that our aesthetic concepts must be such so as to make sense to apply them to features of the external world.

We can think of this unitary account of aesthetic concepts as evincing a certain objectivity. This is most basic etymologically, for a unitary account of aesthetic

² I will not say anything about which properties should be counted as aesthetic; paradigmatic examples are those of beauty and ugliness, but there are no doubt others as well.

³ See Putnam (2002), p.38. For Murdoch’s own comments on the distinction, see Murdoch (1992), Ch.2.

⁴ I will ignore complications about our application of aesthetic concepts to abstract objects.

⁵ See further Williams (1985), esp. ch.8, and Putnam (2002), chs.1-3.

concepts holds that our concepts, possessing as they do both evaluative and descriptive components, apply to objects in the world. But it also involves the thought that aesthetic values are, in some sense, independent of our experience of them; “Art... affords us a pure delight in the independent existence of what is excellent.” (SG, p.83). The caveat “in some sense” is needed, because it need not be part of this picture that aesthetic values could inhere in objects were there no human beings at all. Nor need the claim be incompatible with the thought that picking up on certain aesthetic values might require experiencing objects from within a particular perspective, and within a particular conceptual context.⁶ But rather the claim is simply that in any particular case, the aesthetic properties picked up on are features of reality, and thus independent of any particular experience of them.

Let us say that a concept is *objective* if the entities which it picks out can exist independently of any particular person’s experience of them.⁷ In the case of aesthetic concepts, this amounts to the thought that aesthetic values can inhere in objects independently of my experience of those objects. On this account of aesthetic concepts, experience is to be conceived of as a way of coming to find out about something which exists there anyway. The objectivity of aesthetic concepts leads to a claim about the nature of aesthetic judgements: the correctness, or otherwise, of the application of aesthetic concepts is determined, most basically, not by how things are with me, but how things are in the world. Again the caveat “most basically” is important, for we may wish to leave open the possibility that the presence of aesthetic values in general is determined in some sense by the presence of suitably equipped aesthetes. But for any particular application of an aesthetic concept, one who subscribes to the objectivity of aesthetic concepts must hold that the world determines whether that application is correct. Art leads “the best part of the soul to the view of what is most excellent in reality”; it is both “educator and revealer” (G, p.63).

Various arguments have been offered in support of the unitary nature of aesthetic concepts.⁸ Some have expressed scepticism about the possibility of “disentangling” our aesthetic concepts into descriptive and evaluative components: perhaps it is a necessary condition on the possession of an aesthetic concept that one shares the

⁶ Note Murdoch’s attention to both spatio-temporal and conceptual contexts.

⁷ cf. Brewer’s definition of *empirical realism* in Brewer (2004), p.61 ; a consequence of which would be that empirical concepts are similarly objective.

⁸ Often these considerations are aimed at ‘values’ in general; but the considerations are meant to include aesthetic values.

relevant aesthetic point of view.⁹ Or one may be suspicious of the thought that a subject who mastered the descriptive component could go on to apply it to new cases, for it seems plausible that the property picked out at the descriptive level will not form any natural kind.¹⁰ Others have objected to the dichotomy itself: perhaps there is a logical connection between aesthetic evaluations and descriptive statements.¹¹ Or it may be that Quine's attack on the analytic/ synthetic distinction can be pushed further to show that our utterances are unavoidably compounded of observation, theory and value, ensuring that no distillation of the value-free is possible.¹²

I will not assess these arguments here. Indeed, I will later consider a reason one might reject the unitary account of aesthetic concepts. But given this account of aesthetic concepts, the question I am interested in is: what account of aesthetic experience can explain how it is that we come to possess aesthetic concepts? In the next section I will draw on a discussion in the philosophy of mind to suggest that certain models of aesthetic experience cannot explain how it is that experience provides us with objective aesthetic concepts.

III. AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

The idea that I want to explore arises most prominently in the philosophy of mind debate regarding disjunctive and non-disjunctive theories of perceptual experience. Disjunctive theories of perceptual experience deny what non-disjunctive theories affirm; that perceptions and hallucinations – experiences which seem the same to the subject – have the same fundamental nature.¹³ According to the disjunctivist, in the case of veridical perception, the objects perceived constitute the experience in such a way that an experience of that basic type would not be possible in the absence of those objects.¹⁴ Various considerations have been adduced in favour of the disjunctive model, but one influential line of thought has it that non-disjunctive models of

⁹ Williams (1985), pp.141-145. Williams says that he first heard this “Wittgensteinian idea... expressed by Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch in a seminar in the 1950s” (Williams (1985), p.240, fn. 7).

¹⁰ McDowell (1998d), esp. pp.201-203.

¹¹ For this claim with regards to moral evaluations, see Foot (1978), esp. §1.

¹² Putnam (2002), pp.28-31.

¹³ Sometimes this is expressed by denying that perceptions and hallucinations “have the same nature and, therefore, do not reach out to, or involve as constituents, items external to the subject.” (Snowdon (2005), p.136); others deny that the specific kind of experience I have when perceiving could occur were I not perceiving such a mind-independent object, e.g. Martin (2006), p.357.

¹⁴ On disjunctivism, see Snowdon (1980-1), McDowell (1998a), , Martin (2002).

perceptual experience prevent us from forming empirical concepts, and thus prevent us from thinking about the external world.¹⁵

How does this argument proceed? Of the non-disjunctive model, Bill Child says, “to think of conscious experience as a highest common factor of vision and hallucination is to think of experiences as states of a type whose intrinsic mental features are world-independent; an intrinsic, or basic, characterization of a state of awareness will make no reference to anything external to the subject.” But, he continues, “if this is what experience is like... how can it yield knowledge of an objective world beyond experience, and *how can it so much as put us in a position to think about the world?*” (Child (1994), pp.146-7, my emphasis).

Child’s target here is what we might call *sensational* non-disjunctive models, those on which experience consists in the presence of a mind-dependent object of awareness characterised without any reference to the external world. Why do such models prevent one from forming empirical concepts? Campbell sums up the argument in the following passage:

On the common factor view, all that experience of the object provides you with is a conscious image of the object... The existence of the image... is dependent on the existence of the subject who has the conscious image. So if your conception of the object was provided by your experience of the object, you would presumably end by concluding that the object would not have existed had you not existed, and that the object exists only when you are experiencing it. (Campbell (2002), p.135).

How should we understand this argument? The thought seems to be this: on the sensational non-disjunctive model, experience involves the presence of a mind-dependent object of awareness. But that object of awareness is essentially dependent for its existence on the subject of the experience. Campbell’s claim is that a subject could not extract the conception of something which was independent of her from the experience of such mind-dependent objects. For that would require her using the experience of something which is essentially dependent on her for its existence to

¹⁵ The conceptual approach is present in McDowell (1998a), and developed further in Child (1994), Putnam (1999) and especially Campbell (2002).

ground the concept of something which is not so dependent, and this, Campbell suggests, is none too easy a thing to do.¹⁶

I take this to be an important thought and one relevant to the concerns of this paper.¹⁷ Campbell's charge is that a certain account of perceptual experience cannot serve as the basis for our acquisition of empirical concepts. That is, it cannot play a certain explanatory role: "concepts of individual physical objects and concepts of the observable characteristics of such objects are *made available* by our experience of the world" (Campbell (2002), p.128, my emphasis), and this is what the sensational non-disjunctive model prevents.¹⁸ A model of experience which is characterised purely in sensational terms involves a construal of the nature of the experience in terms of an essential dependence on the subject of the experience. For sensation presents the subject solely with determinations of her own consciousness, and "the whole of self-consciousness therefore provides nothing other than merely our own determinations" (Kant (1998), A378).

How does this help us when thinking about aesthetic experience? Consider an account of aesthetic experience on which aesthetic experience is to be conceived of as involving the presence of a distinctive type of sensation. Perhaps Hume endorsed such a theory when he claimed that "To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration... The case is the same as in our judgements concerning all kinds of beauty, tastes, and sensations." (Hume (1978), p.471). On such an account, aesthetic experience is to be explained as involving the presence of sensations with a certain distinctive character. "So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious [and correspondingly, any object to be ugly], you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a

¹⁶ cf. the conceptual problem of other minds as introduced in Wittgenstein (1953), §302. I argue elsewhere that, with regards to empirical concepts, this line of thought can be traced back to Kant's argument against transcendental realism in the A-edition version of the Fourth Paralogism. Kant (1998).

¹⁷ Although I will not say much in support of disjunctivism here, one should not think that a non-disjunctivist is committed to rejecting this argument. Instead one might fairly claim that Child and Campbell's argument is only effective against sensational versions of the non-disjunctive theory, and thus leaves open the possibility of a non-disjunctive intentional account on which the experiential nature common to perceptions and hallucinations is a general intentional content – a content which need not be specified wholly world-independently. A non-disjunctivist, then, could accept the argument sketched above, whilst denying that it ruled out all non-disjunctive theories.

¹⁸ See also McDowell's claim that on the HCF model of experience, "there is a serious question about how it can be that experience, conceived from its own point of view, is not blank or blind, but purports to be revelatory of the world we live in." McDowell (1998c), p.243.

feeling or sentiment of blame [/ displeasure] from the contemplation of it.” (Hume (1978), p.479).

Such sensations are strictly independent of anything external to the subject’s conscious life; they are characterised wholly without reference to anything in the mind-independent world. As Hume puts it in his essay ‘Of The Standard of Taste’, “beauty and deformity... are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment”, and “sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself” (Hume (1985), p.235, p.229). That is, “no sentiment represents what is really in the object.” (Hume (1985), p.229). Let us call such a position *sensationalist*: aesthetic experience consists in the presence of sensations wholly characterised without reference to anything external to the subject.¹⁹

How does such an account fare with regards to Murdoch’s claim that experience can be a source of our aesthetic concepts? If the disjunctivist argument considered above is correct, then there are grounds for suspicion about whether any sensational account of aesthetic experience could provide us with objective aesthetic concepts. For the sensation of pleasure is characterised wholly without reference to anything external to the subject’s conscious life, and is thus in principle independent of any particular quality in the world. The existence of the sensation, however, is dependent on the existence of the subject undergoing the aesthetic experience. Thus if one’s grasp of aesthetic concepts were based on an experience of that sensation, one should conclude that the concept could not apply to anything in the mind-independent world. Which is to say; the subject could not form objective aesthetic concepts.

Note that this problem cannot be avoided by moving from an ‘act-object’ account of aesthetic experience to an ‘adverbial’ model on which the sensation is understood not as the object of an experience but a *way* of experiencing.²⁰ For the question still remains: how can experience of properties which are presented solely as properties of the experience itself, provide one with the conception of something which can exist independently of the subject’s experience? Such adverbial properties similarly involve an essential dependence on the subject of the experience, and thus cannot ground our

¹⁹ Such a model of aesthetic experience says nothing about the nature of aesthetic judgements, and is thus compatible with both cognitivist and non-cognitivist accounts of the attitude taken towards the content expressed in aesthetic judgements.

²⁰ See Ducasse (1942) for the corresponding move in the case of perception in general.

conception of something independent of us. The adverbial model cannot explain why we take our aesthetic concepts to apply to objects in the world.²¹

A natural response to this argument is to claim that this reading misunderstands the sensationalist position. For the claim is not that the sensations themselves are to be identified with aesthetic properties, but rather that those properties are identical to certain dispositional properties of objects to cause such sensations in suitably endowed aesthetes. (Perhaps this is what Hume means when he says that “beauty is such an order and construction of parts, as... is fitted to give a pleasure and satisfaction to the soul.” (Hume (1978), p.299). This is important, one might think, for it allows the sensationalist to respect a sense in which aesthetic properties are mind-independent: after all, the disposition to produce a certain aesthetic sensation is one which an object possesses anyway, as it were, independently of whether we experience it or not.

An initial question is whether such a move respects the objectivity of aesthetic concepts, at least as understood by Murdoch. For while the dispositional property is certainly a property which objects in the world can possess independently of any particular experience, identifying such a property seems to require disentangling the descriptive aspect of our aesthetic concepts – that bit which refers to the dispositional property to cause certain sensations – from the aesthetic sensation itself. And while the descriptive component fits inside “the world of science and factual propositions” (G, p.57), the aesthetic sensation is not, strictly speaking, a property of the object in the world. And this seems perilously close to the denigration of value to a “shadowy existence” (G, p.57).²²

But there is a deeper objection. The criticism of the sensationalist model of aesthetic experience has focused on whether experience itself can serve as a source of aesthetic concepts. The move to the dispositional model is meant to safeguard the thought that our aesthetic concepts are objective in that they apply to objects in the world. But on such a model is it *experience* which provides us with these aesthetic concepts? Murdoch introduces the idea that experience plays a role in our acquisition of aesthetic concepts with the example of an art critic and an observer gathered around a common object of attention. The claim is that in such a situation the art critic

²¹ cf. Martin’s criticisms of the adverbial model of perception in Martin (1998).

²² Part of the issue here may depend on the strength of rigidity used to pick out the dispositional property.

can draw the observer's attention to phenomenally presented aspects of the object, and thus enable her to develop new aesthetic concepts. Central to this story is the thought that the phenomenal character of aesthetic experience plays a central role in our acquisition of aesthetic concepts: it is because things are presented as being a certain way that we can acquire aesthetic concepts. Experience of aesthetic properties helps us see what the art critic sees because it "alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness" (SG, p.82). The phenomenal character of the experience is not superfluous to this task: it is fundamental in allowing experience to play its explanatory role.

This dispositional account shirks this role. On such a model, the phenomenal character of the experience serves to fix the aesthetic property by being causally correlated with it. But its only role in our grasp of aesthetic concepts is in identifying an aesthetic property as that property – whatever it is – which stands in a causal relation to experiences of this type. It is this causal relation which ensures that the aesthetic concepts grasped are objective; a relation which falls outside the scope of the subject's consciousness proper. Why is this important? For our understanding of the case of the art critic suggests that our acquisition of aesthetic concepts should be comprehensible from within the point of view of the subject. On the dispositional model aesthetic values, *as experienced*, are strictly not features of the world. It cannot explain why experience prompts us to think of aesthetic properties as present in the world.

This allows us to clarify the claim that experience is a way of our coming to possess aesthetic concepts. The claim is that the phenomenal character of aesthetic experience is revelatory of aesthetic properties in a way which allows the subject to acquire aesthetic concepts. And given that our aesthetic concepts are objective in the sense explained above, that requires that it be comprehensible from within the subject's conscious life that aesthetic experience can be a source of objective aesthetic concepts. Perhaps such an account of our aesthetic concepts must ultimately be rejected. But given this understanding of aesthetic concepts, we can see that sensationist accounts of aesthetic experience, whether dispositional or otherwise, cannot explain how experience can serve as the source of such concepts.

IV. THE METAPHOR OF VISION

The argument so far has shown that if we want to do justice to Murdoch's claim that aesthetic experience can serve as a source of aesthetic concepts, we cannot hold both that our aesthetic concepts are objective and that aesthetic experience is sensational in character. That gives us two ways of avoiding the antinomy: either we give up the claim that our aesthetic concepts are objective or we deny that aesthetic experience is sensational.²³ In this section I want to explore each of these options.²⁴

Let us consider the first option, that of rejecting the objectivity of aesthetic concepts. Hume, for example, accepted that his sensational account of aesthetic experience led to the conclusion that aesthetic judgements, properly understood, did not predicate aesthetic properties of objects in the world: "when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious [in the aesthetic case, ugly], you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame [/displeasure] from the contemplation of it." (Hume (1978), p.469). And this claim about judgement is endorsed because "Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them." (Hume (1985), p.230).

Hume's account is non-cognitivist with regards to aesthetic judgements, but a defender of the sensational model can be neutral on the correct account of aesthetic judgement so long as they reject the objectivity of aesthetic concepts. The most basic way to do this is simply to disentangle our aesthetic concepts into two components: a purely descriptive part, which applies to objects in the world, and an evaluative component which is separable from such applications. The dispositional account in effect endorsed such a procedure, with the descriptive component being understood as a dispositional property of objects to cause sensations with a certain character. Once our aesthetic concepts have been bifurcated there is no reason to think that the evaluative component can exist independently of any particular experience. Aesthetic concepts are not objective.

Proponents of such a bifurcationary approach hold that one can give an exhaustive account of the meaning of our aesthetic terms by distinguishing the descriptive component – that feature in the world to which application of the term is responsive –

²³ Of course, one could also give up the claim about experience, but I am simply taking that for granted here.

²⁴ In a longer version of this paper, I argue that setting out the options in this way allows us to shed light on the debate between J.L. Mackie and John McDowell regarding the status of aesthetic values, see Mackie (1977) and McDowell (1998b).

from the evaluative component – that which explains the attitude we take towards objects which exhibit that descriptive property. Once such a bifurcation has been provided, the sensationalist can claim that experience can provide us with the material for understanding our evaluative responses towards certain works of art, without needing to claim that experience provides us with the concepts of aesthetic value as things which can exist out there in the world.

Although this strategy rejects objectivity at the level of concepts and properties, it does not immediately follow that it cannot explain how some aesthetic judgements can be incorrect. Hume’s ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ is perhaps the most famous attempt to account for the normativity of our aesthetic judgements within a sensationalist model of aesthetic experience, and further argument would be needed to show that any such approach must fail. But perhaps it is fair to say that someone who takes aesthetic values to be features of reality will have an easier explanation of why it is that aesthetic judgements are susceptible of correctness and incorrectness.

Someone who rejects the objectivity of aesthetic concepts will also have to engage with the arguments referred to in ns.9-12 above, which aim to show that such a disentangling cannot be achieved. These critiques, like that of accounting for the normativity of aesthetic judgements, come from reflections within the practice of aesthetic judgment and experience. Let me call them *internal* criticisms. Rejecting the objectivity of aesthetic concepts requires engaging with these worries.

The alternative option is to reject the sensationalist account of aesthetic experience. How might one do this? Reference to the disjunctive model of perceptual experience above suggests one alternative: a model of aesthetic experience on which aesthetic properties of objects partly constitute the aesthetic experience and thereby determine its phenomenal character. On such a perceptual model, aesthetic experience is not to be thought of as involving the presence of certain object-independent sensations, but rather as the direct presentation of aesthetic features of the world, features which determine the phenomenal character of one’s aesthetic experience. Aesthetic value is something “residing in the object and available to be encountered” (McDowell (1998b), p.112). Sensitivity to those features will no doubt require that the perceiver be situated in a particular way, but when she is situated at a particular point of view –

understood widely to include both spatio-temporal and conceptual contexts²⁵ – her experience presents her directly with that feature of the world.

The model of aesthetic experience that flows through *The Sovereignty of Good* seems to be of this form. “It is as if we can see beauty itself... I can *experience* the transcendence of the beautiful... because beauty is partly a matter of the senses.” (G, p.58). Conceiving of values as a perceptible feature of reality requires making room for an understanding of perceptual experience on which aesthetic values, as features of the world, can be present in our conscious lives. “Beauty is the convenient and traditional name of something which art and nature share, and which gives a fairly clear sense to the idea of quality of experience [and] change in consciousness.” (SG, p.82).²⁶ And when we consider how this can be possible, how it can be that aesthetic experience presents us with values that are features of the world, “is not the metaphor of vision almost irresistibly suggested to anyone who, without philosophical prejudice, wishes to describe the situation?” (IP, p.22).

Murdoch’s picture of aesthetic experience, then, seems to me to be in concordance with her view both that aesthetic concepts are objective and that experience can be a source of such concepts. It is by presenting us directly with perceptible features of the world that the art critic can enrich our aesthetic conceptual repertoire: “learning takes place... in the context of particular acts of attention.” (IP, p.31). But even if this perceptual model is “irresistibly suggested”, still “philosophical prejudice” – or, worse, philosophical argument – may tell against it. What difficulties are presented by such an account of aesthetic experience?

The most obvious criticism that will be levelled against this sort of account is that of explaining how it is that aesthetic values can be a feature of reality. What metaphysical status can they have which explains how they can both have an evaluative function and yet be part of the “fabric of the world”? If there were objective aesthetic values, “they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything in the universe.” (Mackie (1997), p.38). This is sometimes supported with appeal to aesthetic variation, for “[t]he sentiments of men often differ with regard to beauty and deformity of all kinds, even while their general discourse is the same.” (Hume (1985), p.227). Such a critique seems to me to be external to the practice of aesthetic judgement and experience: it is not attention to

²⁵ cf. Moore’s definition of a ‘point of view’. (Moore (1997), p.6).

²⁶ The Routledge Classics edition (2001) has the typo ‘arid’ for ‘and’.

the form of our aesthetic life which tells against the perceptual model, but a problem of seeing how that model of aesthetic experience can fit in with other important commitments. A defender of the perceptual model is committed to engaging with and responding to these difficulties.

V. SECURING OBJECTIVITY

The overarching aim in this paper has been to do justice to Murdoch's claim that experience can be the source of our aesthetic concepts. And, drawing on an argument from the philosophy of mind, I have suggested that we cannot endorse this role for aesthetic experience whilst claiming both that our aesthetic concepts are objective and that aesthetic experience is sensational in character. Something has to give: either we reject the objectivity of aesthetic concepts, or we adopt an alternative model of aesthetic experience. Neither option comes cost-free: rejecting a unitary account of aesthetic concepts requires addressing various internal critiques, whilst a perceptual model of aesthetic experience seems to conflict with various plausible external positions. No doubt which option one sees as more promising will be partly a matter of temperament. However in this final section I want to return to some issues in the philosophy of mind and suggest one reason for thinking that we should not reject a unitary account of aesthetic concepts.

The problem I want to highlight is most clearly raised by Naomi Eilan in her discussion of David Chalmers' 'hard problem of consciousness'.²⁷ When setting up the 'hard problem of consciousness', Chalmers distinguishes two wholly independent concepts of mind: "The first is the *phenomenal* concept of mind. This is the concept of mind as conscious experience, and of a mental state as a consciously experienced mental state... The second is the *psychological* concept of mind. This is the concept of mind as the causal or explanatory basis for behaviour... They cover different phenomena, both of which are quite real." (Chalmers (1996), p.11). According to this approach, one can give an exhaustive account of the phenomenal aspects of the mind without any reference to the causal structure and vice versa. Those psychological functional aspects of the mind fit easily into our understanding of the natural world: these are the easy problems of consciousness. The 'hard problem of consciousness',

²⁷ Chalmers (1996), Eilan (2000), Eilan (2001).

according to Chalmers, arises for those phenomenal parts of the mind: how do we fit those into the natural world?

The bifurcation which sets up this approach is clearly reminiscent of the disentangling of aesthetic concepts endorsed by those who reject the objectivity of aesthetic concepts, so we should expect any criticism to be relevant to our discussion. Much of the criticism of Chalmers has focused on his dualistic response to the hard problem: the claim that we cannot fit the phenomenal aspects of the mind into that natural world, and therefore have to endorse basic, conscious properties. But Eilan's criticism of Chalmers is more fundamental than simply objecting to his solution to the problem. Rather for Eilan there is something deeply problematic about the way the two-concept approach sets up the problem of consciousness. For, if such a view is correct, we have no explanation of why we would even *think* of the phenomenal aspects of the mind as fitting into the natural world.

The trouble with the two-concept theory is that, if it were true, then there would not be even *prima facie* internal justification for treating our phenomenal states and their properties as the causes and effects of how things are in the spatio-causal world. For on the two-concept theory... the phenomenal concepts we use have no causal implications at all. *On this view it should be a wild unwarranted leap in the dark, at best, to link phenomenology to causal happenings in the world.* (Eilan (2001), p.184. Second italics mine)

Eilan's criticism is internal to the nature of our thinking about consciousness. Either our ordinary thinking about consciousness commits us to phenomenal properties fitting into the natural world or it does not. "If the two-concept story is right, then our ordinary thinking does not commit us to any such realism, and there is nothing to be baffled about. If, on the other hand, we are committed to realism, then the two-concept story is wrong, and should be abandoned when we set out to give an account of what realism about phenomenal properties comes to." (Eilan (2001), p.185). If our mental concepts really have two distinct lives, then we have no explanation of why we would even think of the phenomenal components as fitting into the causal structure of the world. Acknowledging that our ordinary thought does commit us to this realism about phenomenal properties means that we must show how

we can replace the two-concept approach with a unitary account of our mental concepts.²⁸

It seems to me that something similar can be said in favour of a unitary account of aesthetic concepts. For we should take it as undeniable that ordinary thinking commits us to our aesthetic concepts applying to objects in the world. As McDowell says, “that value is a part of the world [is] a claim that the phenomenology of value has made attractive to philosophers and ordinary people.” (McDowell (1998b), p.129). The trouble with the disentangling procedure, one might say, is that if it were true then there would be no *prima facie* justification for doing so, for our evaluative concepts have no descriptive implications at all. It should be a wild unwarranted leap in the dark, at best, to link evaluation to objective features in the world.

If this is right, then we should agree with Murdoch that our aesthetic concepts are objective, and given the argument of this paper, endorse a perceptual model of aesthetic experience. Much more needs to be said in support of such a model, but it seems to me that in *The Sovereignty of Good* we get a wonderful picture of how the metaphor of vision can be used in support of the claim that experience provides us with our aesthetic concepts. “We develop language in the context of looking” (IP, p.32), and it is through direct presentation of aesthetic properties that we come to think about beauty.

²⁸ Eilan acknowledges that “abandoning the two-concept approach is very much easier said than done” (Eilan (2000), p.37), before sketching a way in which one might begin to develop and support a unitary account.

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